

THOUGHTS ON RĀMĀYANA

DR. I. PANDURANGA RAO

Published by
AKSHARA BHĀRATĪ
CALCUTTA

THOUGHTS ON RĀMĀYAṆA

with respectful
regards
to
Dr. Satya Vrat Sastri
D. D. Sastri
24. 11. 1933

DR. I. PANDURANGA RAO

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Sanskrit Pronunciation Guide

Digitized by Arya Samaj Foundation Chennai and eGangotri

Vowels

अ a आ ā इ i ई ī उ u ऊ ū ऋ ṛ ॠ ṝ
लृ ḷ ए e ऐ ai ओ o औ au

˙ m (anusvara) ː ḥ (visarga)

Consonants

Gutturals:	क ka	ख kha	ग ga	घ gha	ङ ṅa
Palatals:	च ca	छ cha	ज ja	झ jha	ञ ña
Cerebrals:	ट ṭa	ठ ṭha	ड ḍa	ढ ḍha	ण ṇa
Dentals :	त ta	थ tha	द da	ध dha	न na
Labials :	प pa	फ pha	ब ba	भ bha	म ma
Semivowels :	य ya	र ra	ल la	व va	
Sibilants :	श śa	ष ṣa	स sa		
Aspirate :	ह ha	ऽ = ' (avagraha) - the apostrophe			
	क्ष kṣa	ज्ञ jña	ळ ḷ		

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- ◆ STRĪ-DHARMA IN RĀMĀYAṆA
- ◆ THE VOICE OF VĀLMĪKI
- ◆ AN EPIC FOR ALL
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THE MESSAGE OF RĀMĀYAṆA TO THE MODERN WORLD.

To each one of us, *Rāmāyaṇa* has a message and a meaning. For the common man, *Rāmāyaṇa* is a fascinating story entertaining the vast mass of humanity since time immemorial. For a man of letters, it has been a trend-setter and a time honoured epic providing inspiration to a number of writers, at home and abroad. For a humanist, it has been serving as a code of conduct and a hand-book that comes in handy in times of distress, conflict and confusion. For a philosopher, it provides a clue to the ultimate good to be realised, both herein and hereafter, presenting a reverberating version of the Vedic vision within and without. Finally, for the poet who has created this highly suggestive piece of literary composition, it is neither a story, nor an epic, nor a code, nor a philosophical treatise, but it is simply a quest for humanity — literally a MARCH IN SEARCH OF MAN, as the word *Rāmāyaṇa* indicates, *Rāma* stands for the ideal man that the sage *Vālmīki* was looking for and the word *ayana* connotes the march/movement and is the characteristic feature of this pivotal personality. Thus, the main thrust of the *Rāmāyaṇa* was to visualise and realise the advent and advancement of a man perfect in form, ideal in behaviour and purposeful in life.

THE WORD AND THE WORK

Rāmāyaṇa, the word and *Rāmāyaṇa* the work, are both unique, immortal and unparalleled creations of a Mastermind, sagacious in vision, soft and sophisticated in

speech and silently eloquent in message. A deeper study of the *Rāmāyaṇa* reveals that it is much more than a story or an epic; it is an everlasting and indefatigable light-house that has been working ever since the world started gaining insight into the history of Indian literature, culture and philosophy, as a transformer converting blinding darkness into leading light. It bears testimony to the vedic verdict that a single syllable can serve as a source of stupendous splendour (*akṣarād - dīptirucyate*). This celebrated work has therefore, been very appropriately described as a poetic version of the vedic vision (*vedāḥ prācetasādāsīt sākṣāt rāmāyaṇātmanā*).

The word *Rāmāyaṇa* also presents a judicious combination of static tranquillity and dynamic adaptability. The word *Rāma*, is derived from the root 'Ram' meaning to get absorbed; and the *ayana* from the root 'i' meaning 'to move on'. In *Rāma* we find both these traits in a rational proportion, making him a complete man - the Man of *Vālmīki*.

The word *Rāmāyaṇa* was so thoughtfully coined by *Vālmīki* that it includes the woman as well as the Man conceived by the Master. *Rāmā* the feminine form of *Rāma* stands for *Sītā* and so the word *Rāmāyaṇa*, split up in two ways - *Rāma* + *Ayana* and also *Rāmā* + *Ayana* - denotes the concurrent and coordinated March of both *Rāma*, the son of *Daśaratha* and *Rāmā* the offspring of *Janaka*. *Vālmīki* uses the word *Rāmā* to denote *Jānakī* at a number of places. Thus the concept of equal importance to man and woman is inherent in the very title *Rāmāyaṇa*. In fact

Vālmīki refers to his work as the great grand story of *Sītā* (*sītāyāscaritam mahat*)

RĀMĀYANA AND RĀMA CARITA MĀNASA

Gosvāmī Tulasī Dāsa used the word '*caritam*' very appropriately in naming his celebrated work '*Rāma Carita Mānasa*'. Incidentally, the word '*carita*' used by *Gosvāmī*, too, has the connotation of movement or habitation and the saint has placed his '*Mānasa*' at the disposal of his Lord to inhabit. That is why he seeks the blessings of *Śrī Gaṇeśa* to ensure that his '*Mānasa*' the innermost conscience surging with vibrant waves of devotion, becomes the blissful abode or habitat for his Lord (*basahu rāma siya mānasa more*). thus, the *ayanam* of the *Ādikavi* has been wisely reinterpreted by the medieval saint poet *Tulasī* as a *mānasa*, the forum for the sportive manifestation and the characteristic deeds (*caritam*) of his Lord. We are, therefore, fully justified in establishing a link between the two great souls when we say *Vālmīki* is reborn as *Tulasī* (*vālmīki tulasī bhayo*).

If *Rāma* was an embodiment of *Dharma* (*rāmo vighrahavān dharmah*) *Gosvāmī Tulasī Dāsa* was Devotion personified. Devotion or *Bhakti* is the main spirit behind this immortal work which *Vālmīki* chose to name *ayanam* to start with. It was indeed a big 'start' which took innumerable forms not only throughout the country of its origin, but also beyond its physical boundaries. It was rightfully said about this magnificent work of universal appeal, that it would spread far and wide-wherever humanity exists, rivers continue to flow and mountains stand firm.

THE OTHER RAMAYANAS

In all the Indian languages, we have a number of great epics based on the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. To name a few, *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil, *Torāvai Rāmāyaṇam* in Kannada, '*Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*' in Telugu, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* in Malayalam, *Bhāvārtha Rāmāyaṇa* in Marathi, *Giridhara Rāmāyaṇam* in Gujarati, *Kṛtīvāsa Rāmāyaṇam* in Bengali, *Balarāma Dāsa Rāmāyaṇam* in Oriya, *Mādhava kandali Rāmāyaṇam* in Assamese besides hundreds of works in Sanskrit, which have all given multiple colours and flavours to this fascinating theme which has become an integral part of Indian thought and culture.

Bhakti (devotion), *Śakti* (Spiritual power) and *Rakti* (popular appeal) are the three main facets which have driven home the message of this time-honoured composition ever since its genesis and hopefully it will continue to provide inspiration, guidance and direction to humanity in the centuries to come. *Vālmīki*, being a pioneer in the field, maintained a remarkable balance between the three, while the later poets chose one of them as their main stream and incorporated the other two as tributaries. For instance, *Bhakti* is the main stream of *Rāma Carita Mānasa*; while *Rakti* that of works like *Rāmacandrikā* of *Keśava Dāsa*. Whatever the main thrust, almost all exponents of the theme freely deviated from the original course of events depicted by *Vālmīki*. But this deviation has only added dignity and magnanimity to the original theme as the message conveyed, and intended to be conveyed is the same throughout.

RĀMA — THE IDEAL MAN

In order to conduct what we may call *guṇa jñāsā* an enquiry into the qualities — both essential and desirable — that go to make up a full man, the secular saint *Vālmīki* approaches the celestial sage *Nārada*, in whom the ascetic saint perceives a rare combination of penance and perseverance, speech and silence, and the physical and the metaphysical. This enquiry, poised and positive on both sides results in a pleasant discovery of a man, very much present at the time of enquiry, who satisfies all the requirements of a human being — physically fit, mentally alert, intellectually well advanced and spiritually elevated. 'Name *Rāma*, you have named everything else', is the sum and substance of the message of Sage *Nārada*. In one single word, *Nārada* summarises *Rāma* as *Guṇavān*, a person who stands for many, accounts for many and implies many — as many as one can imagine and, in fact, anything in the universe that promotes good, love and bliss, though physically he is one and only one. This oneness, multiplying itself into as many as are required, is the basic virtue of *Rāma* whose humanity excels divinity mainly because of his intrinsic humility coupled with dignity and decency.

Truth and justice (*Satya and Dharma*) are the two facets of *Rāma*'s personality. *Nārada* describes him as another name for *Dharma* in matters relating to *Satya* (*Satya Dharma Ivāparaḥ*). *Vālmīki* often refers to *Rāma* as *Satya Parākrama* (one who derives strength from truth) and *Dharmajña* (one who knows what is right). But occassionally we find that he is depicted as *Satya Dharma*

Parāyaṇa – one who can manage both truth and justice with great ingenuity. It appears as if truth and justice are the two feet for him which enable him to proceed further and further in all walks of life, with a self-conditioned mechanism built in by birth in the psychophysical organism of man, the immortal soul in the mortal frame. It is surprising to find that even his avowed enemies like *Māṛica*, refer to *Rāma* as the embodiment of righteousness (*vigrahavān dharmah*). *Dharma* stands not merely for justice, but also for righteous conduct and a virtuous life. In fact, *Dharma* supports life, sustains and sophisticates it and *Dharma* in turn gets supported by life (*dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ*). Mother *Kausalyā*, while blessing her son *Rāma* on the occasion of his leaving for the forests, refers in the first instance, to the righteousness (*Dharma*) that *Rāma* had been upholding throughout, and prays that it should protect him in the years to come.

*yaṁ pālayasi dharmam tvam prītyā ca niyamena ca |
sa vai rāghava śārdūla dharma-stvāmabhirakṣatu ||*

The materialistic mother *Kaikeyī*, on the other hand, stands firm on the letter of truth (*Satya*), unmindful and unconcerned about the irreparable damage done to the spirit of righteousness (*Dharma*). Thus there arises an obvious conflict between truth and justice and *Rāma* resolves it with a sophisticated device – the device of wilful withdrawal from the worldly attractions and allurements. He declares from a highly elevated plane, in a remarkably humble tone, to the ill-meaning mother that he is least interested in the material

wealth of the world, as the more meaningful universe is eagerly waiting for his purposeful intervention.

*nāhamartha-parodevī lokam-āvastum-utsahe |
viddhimām-ṛṣibhistulyam vimalam dharmamāśritam ||*

It is this dignity that elevates human beings far above the level of celestial splendour. A clear conscience with a selfless devotion finds no conflict however complex the circumstances might appear to be.

HUMAN QUALITIES OF LORD RĀMA

Concern and compassion for all is the key note to success in life, both material and metaphysical. This is revealed in the delineation of the character of *Rāma*, whose dynamic advancement gradually unfolds the unfathomable divinity within him. Even at the age of sixteen, he finds his prospective preceptor proclaiming the potentialities of the magnificent man (*mahātmā*) within him.

aham vedmi mahātmānam rāmaṁ satyaparākramam |

As a father, *Daśaratha* finds it difficult to realise the truth in this statement, while *Vasiṣṭha* feels happy to find his counterpart *Viśvāmitra* taking over the responsibility of re-charging the Prince *Rāma* with the divinity latent in him. But left to himself *Rāma* never accepts any form of divinity attributed to him at any stage, and declares that he is a man- a total human being — born and brought up as a son of *Daśaratha*.

ātmānam mānuṣam manye rāmaṁ daśarathātmajam ||

Though potentially divine as any other human being, he behaves like a man with unassuming and utter simplicity

characteristic of a person in flesh and blood. He suspects *Kaikeyī* of her evil intentions and persuades *Lakṣmaṇa* to go back to *Ayodhyā* to protect the king and *Kausalyā* from the cruel hands of the unscrupulous *Kaikeyī*.

He shares the down to earth pleasure of running after the golden deer with his innocent wife *Jānakī*. He frowns at the forests and mountains in a fit of anger when they fail to answer his wild enquiries about the mysterious disappearance of his wife. He cries like a child when he finds the devoted bird *Jatāyu* breathing the last moments of its life. He feels miserable recollecting the past events which deprived him of the royal comfort, paternal affection, company of his wife, one after another. He feels helpless that he is not able to save at least the little bird. Similarly, he weeps on the shoulders of his brother *Lakṣmaṇa* many a time, and, at one stage, is deeply distressed when the latter lies unconscious in the battle field. He suspects his devoted wife, though for the sake of the world, as he puts it, and subjects her to a fiery ordeal. These are all the weaknesses which make *Rāma* totally human.

While this human touch brings the man of *Vālmiki* closer to the common man, his magnanimity in discarding the worldly pleasures in a moment, at the instance of his stepmother; his simplicity in soliciting the friendship of *Sugrīva*; his insight into the intrinsic capabilities of *Hanumān*; his diplomatic behaviour with the ocean; his genuine appreciation of the outstanding qualities of *Rāvaṇa* despite his malafide intentions; and, above all, his attitude towards life totally detached from the spiritual point of view

but wholly committed to the establishment of human values and eradication of evil are the qualities which elevate him far above the level of the sages and Gods and godly persons whom he comes across in life.

Vālmīki excels more in suggestive silence than in eloquent speech as far as his message is concerned. He speaks through his characters, who also often choose to be less eloquent in order to be more expressive. Sometimes even inanimate objects express themselves better than articulate beings when they feel the solemn touch of the Sage-Poet (*kāvyaṛṣi*). For instance, when the sage stands on the bank of the river *Tamasā*, watching the whispering waves, the crystal clear water seems to be suggesting to the seer that the human mind, too, should try to follow the fascinating movement of the river water. The poet gives a secular expression to this incomprehensible voice of the river thus :

akardamamidaṁ tīrthaṁ bharadvāja niśamaya |
ramaṇīyaṁ prasannāmbu sanmanuṣya manoyathā ||

(Look, my dear *Bharadvāja*! Just listen to the pleasant and placid water flowing with graceful gait like the pure conscience of a gentle person.)

While saying this to his intimate disciple *Bharadvāja*, the sage must have had, at the back of his mind, the qualities of a perfect man, narrated by *Nārada* only a few days back when he was approached by the sage to find out whether a man with all the best qualities ever existed on this earth. *Nārada* says in clear terms, 'Yes, such a man exists – right now and here, with us, in us and around us', and points out *Rāma*, a man of great potential, a rare

specimen of righteousness personified, and an admirable admixture of wisdom and strength, courage and compassion, conviction and consideration, dedication and detachment, and, finally, ultimate reality and immediate justice. The sage poet *Vālmīki* finds all these qualities reflected in the reverberating river *Tamasā*. Thus the man of vision identifies the man of mission whose thoughts, actions and expressions are themselves enduring messages for the vast mass of humanity. As the basic concern in all these qualities and attributes is humanity, *Vālmīki* finds that the man of his vision is one whose human virtues make him and his admirers forget even the intrinsic divinity within him. This is the sort of man that *Vālmīki* has in mind while talking to the celestial sage *Nārada*, and he gets it confirmed while watching the river *Tamasā* speaking to the sage in a language intelligible to those who have a refined sense of understanding without the aid of grammar as syntax. Thus the primary message that the *Rāmāyaṇa* has for humankind, as a work of art, is that the basis for all human resource development is to create Man. Dignity, decency and decorum are the basic virtues which go to make up a man—a human being. If the human being is human in this sense of the term, the world is worth living, otherwise all the physical prosperity and scientific advancement will work against humanity and the purpose of life itself gets defeated.

ROLE OF SĪTĀ

The place of women in society is another common topic which finds a realistic approach in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The very title of the story, *Rāmāyaṇa* places man and woman

(particularly *Rāma* and *Sītā*) on the same pedestal, giving them equal status, dignity and importance, But this was not just a jugglery of words that *Valmiki* played with, He meant what he hinted at in the coinage of the word *Rāmāyaṇa* as a highly suggestive and comprehensive title for his composition.

If we carefully analyse the course of events that brought elevation and elegance to the ideal couple – *Rāma* and *Sītā* – we find that each one of them is a match for the other in all respects – in physical beauty, mental make-up, metaphysical outlook, spirit of service and sacrifice, concern for others even at the cost of personal comforts, indifference towards earthly pleasures, integrity in thought, word and deed, unshakable faith and trust equally reciprocated by both, and, above all, a sympathy for the human kind even in the face of unkindness and unreasonableness. This perfect coordination between the two makes *Tulasī* exclaim in his heart of hearts that the whole world is filled with the images of *Sītā* and *Rāma*, (*sīyarāmamaya saba jaga jānī karahun praṇām jori jug panī*) and he offers *praṇāma* to the universal manifestation of the individual will-power with folded hands. It appears as if the two are ever present every where, for every one, in the form of the two hands; the right hand representing *Rāma* and the left one his life-companion, *Sītā*.

In some respects *Sītā* excels *Rāma*. *Rāma* became great because *Sītā* was greater. Her readiness to leave for the forests along with her husband, and the forbearance she showed towards all atrocities committed on her not only by the evil minded enemies but also by her own well-meaning

husband, reflected her guiding principle in life – silent suffering with strong determination to stick to the path of righteousness. This attitude towards life did reward her and her husband and made not only their characterisation immortal, but more importantly, their message universal and eternal. This is what *Sumantra* says while consoling King *Daśaratha* and the grief-stricken Queen *Kausalyā* :

na śocyāste na cātmā te śocyonāpi janādhipaḥ |
idam hi caritam loke pratiṣṭhāsyati śāśvatam ||

(There is nothing to worry about your dearest son and devoted daughter-in-law. They are quite happy because they have invited this course of suffering on their own. They are treating pleasure and pain alike. Therefore, neither you nor the king should be distressed at this turn of events which is bound to be a landmark in the history of mankind while endurance takes the trivial troubles and turmoils that we are facing now, in its stride.)

These words of *Sumantra* have a *māntrik* (enchanting) effect, not only on the aged parents, but also on the age old humanity as they provide strength – mental and spiritual – to the majority of the suffering community in the world. Suffering is not a curse, but a crude form of penance, gifted to a selected few who are designed and destined to distinguish themselves as the commissioned counsellors for human dignity *Pratiṣṭhā*.

It may be recalled that the word *Pratiṣṭhā* occurs for the first time in the very first utterance of the sage *Vālmīki* (*mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvam*). The same word repeated here as spoken by the royal charioteer *Sumantra*, needs to be

compared and correlated with its earlier reference. What is *pratiṣṭhā*? May be, that is the essence of life — the net product of all pleasures and pains of life, what remains after every thing in life disappears. All that happens fades away, but the feeling left by these events does remain ultimately. This 'ultimate' serves as an ultimatum to those who try to tread the path of personal, temporary and temporal gratification in preference to long term general good of all. This is the message which *Vālmīki* is trying to convey here through *Sumantra* whom he describes as *Mantra Kovida* (an expert in the efficacy of human Voice)

It is the establishment of these human values leading to the unfoldment of divinity in man, that makes the story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* relevant to any human society and at any point of time. As long as there is a need to establish peace replacing terror, to ensure the general good of mankind and promote harmony in the physical, intellectual and spiritual planes of conscience, the theme of the *Rāmāyaṇa* provides an immediate solution to the endless problems of life, if only the world has an ear to hear the voice of the wise. In the absence of such a healthy attitude towards life, millions of women like *Jānakī* continue to question villainous and heinous persons like *Rāvaṇa*, whether a sound and sane advice exists or not, and, if it exists, whether it receive proper attention or not. The conquest of *Rāma* over *Rāvaṇa* is, therefore, a conquest of truth over falsehood, righteousness over aggression, generosity over exploitation and rehabilitation over annihilation.

A POET FOR ALL SEASONS

There is yet another aspect which takes the theme of the *Rāmāyana* beyond the limitations of time and space. If *Rāma* is considered to be an apparant manifestation of the absolute reality, then the *Rāmāyana* takes the form of a *Veda*, rewritten in the secular language by the sage *Vālmīki*, an outstanding exponent of the calculus of speech. A careful analysis of the language employed in the *Rāmāyana* reveals that the sage distinguishes himself not only in speech but even in silence. His silence is perhaps more eloquent than his speech. This rare combination of vocal silence and silent speech seems to have been inherited by the sage from his counterpart *Nārada*, who is basically a *Munipuṅgava* (an expert in speaking through silence) but occasionally becomes *Vāgvidāmbhara* (an accomplished exponent of speech). *Vālmīki* is often compared by his admirers as a sweet tongued cuckoo singing the glory of *Rāma*, literally repeating the word *Rāma* in a sweet and melodious voice.

kūjantaṁ rāma rāmeti madhuraṁ madhurākṣaram |
āruhya kavita śakhā vande vālmīki kokilam ||

The word *Rāma* is itself sweet intrinsically and the voice that breathes life into each and every syllable of this word makes it sweeter and sweeter (*madhuraṁ madhurākṣaram*). Thus, the treatment that the theme of the *Rāmāyana* receives in the hands of the sage *Vālmīki* is superbly sweet and significant both in letter and spirit.

That is why *Brahmā*, the creator, after providing the necessary inspiration to the poet to compose the immortal

work *Rāmāyaṇa* declares in a tone of blessing, that this work will gain currency with the passage of time and continue to flourish for as long as mountains have the strength to stand on their own and rivers have the means to flow with gaiety and grandeur.

yāvat sthāsyanti girayaḥ saritāśca mahātale |
tāvad rāmāyaṇakathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati ||

NON-VIOLENCE—A MESSAGE FOR TODAY'S WORLD

Vālmīki, the recipient of this rewarding word of encouragement, immediately recalls two incidents that preceded this eventful moment. The sight of the *Tamasā* flowing with crystal clear water—pure and serene, like emotions recollected in tranquillity, reminding him of a man as deep as an ocean, as steadfast as a mountain and an embodiment of all the virtues that humanity can cherish. These feelings present a very optimistic picture of the Man that stands for human dignity and intrinsic purity.

Delighted to find an ideal human mind reflected in the river water, *Vālmīki* takes a walk on the river bank. He looks around. He finds a couple of birds sitting on the branch of a tree, engrossed in their sweet and soulful moments of joy. Suddenly a hunter shoots down the male bird, separating the mates for no fault of theirs and to no advantage of his. This shakes the tender heart of the sage and his anguish bursts out in verse. This is the famous verse which is supposed to have converted deep agony (*śoka*) into a fine poetic expression (*śloka*) an emotional outburst into an elegant verse. The very starting of the

verse, *mā niṣāda* (Oh ! hunter, thou shall not) has a startling and stimulating effect which has had a lasting impact on human heart right from the vedic or epic age down to the modern age.

The often repeated verse firmly sealed in the hearts of all compassionate lovers of poetry, deserves a reproduction.

mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām tvamagamah śāsvaṭiḥ samāḥ |
yat krauncamithunād-ekam-avadhīḥ kāmamohitam ||

(You cruel hunter, thou shall not live for long with respect and rapport as you have mercilessly killed one of the two innocent creatures, depriving the pair of their legitimate pleasure.)

The moments that followed were momentous not only for the poetic community, but also for the entire humanity as this evocative verse encapsulated the basic message of NON – KILLING to the human race. This is all the more relevant to the modern world miserably caught in a mess of mad and misdirected man-killing day-in and day-out. What is more significant to us today, is that this message, voiced by a magnanimous heart, condemns not only killing, of human beings, but all killings, causing any imbalance in the organisation of the environment in which we are fortunately alive inspite of our meaningless animosity towards our fellow beings and the nature that nurtures us. This utterance made by the sage poet, in a moment of grief coupled with compassion for the cosmic community, has a world of significance for the citizens of the world who would inevitably be depriving themselves of the right to live if

they do not care for others who also enjoy this right by law of nature and natural justice.

This spontaneous outburst of turbulent emotions lying latent all the time in the tender heart of the sage marks the main thrust of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Love and compassion are the two qualities that humanity should cultivate at all costs. This is the message that the sage wanted to convey through his work. It was this universal love and compassion that made *Rāma* the Man of the sage — a man whose contact physically dispels all evil thoughts as testified in episodes like the redemption granted to *Ahalyā*. Where there is *Rāma*, there is no place for *Kāma* (passion) because there is nothing but love in his heart. A heart full of love can inhabit the whole universe and rehabilitate the distressed, the disabled and the depressed.

The universal approach to human values, more practiced than preached by *Rāma* throughout his life, did not, however, mitigate his affection for his family, community and friends to whom he has social or moral obligations. His motto in life appears to be 'one for all and not all for one'. In the words of *Nārada* he is a protector of humanity in general with due regard to meticulous care for the righteous conduct, while he pays equal attention to his own *Dharma* in looking after the welfare of his kith and kin.

rakṣitā jīva lokasya dharmasya parirakṣitā
rakṣitā svasya dharmasya svajanasya ca rakṣitā

But the man who could bring about this ideal state of life, himself had to suffer a lot in his life-time. He lost his

kingdom, lost his father, his wife and a lot more things but only to improve the lot of the vast mass of humanity. He presents an example as to how selfless love and supreme sacrifice can provide a solution – perhaps the only solution – to the eternal problems of life. This is the highest truth which the *Rāmāyaṇa* is intended to establish. A word, too, of consolation, uttered by the royal charioteer, *Sumantra*, summarises the main thrust of this immortal composition.

PRATIṢṬHĀ – THE KEY THEME

The word *Pratiṣṭhā* (establishment of all that is good and abandoning all that is evil) as already pointed out earlier is, in short, the main thrust of the work. For those who have regard and respect for this greater virtue of humanity, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is not only a story but a reality. The heart that can install the idol of these ideals becomes the abode of *Rāma*. *Rāma* and *Rāmāyaṇa* are, therefore, as real and relevant at any point of time and in any point of space as they were once upon a time in the blessed land of *Ayodhyā*. The word *Ayodhyā* literally means the ‘invincible’. A strong determination to face the realities of life with courage, conviction and compassion is what makes any place as significant as *Ayodhyā*.

If we can realise this truth, we would have realised all the ideals for which *Rāma* stood and still stands. It is in this spirit that the admirers of *Rāma* and *Rāmāyaṇa* often say :

caritaṁ raghunāthasya śatakoṭi pravistaram |
ekaikamekṣaraṇaṁ prakāśaṁ mahāpātaka nāśanam. ||

COMPOSITE CULTURES

In the *Rāmāyana* of *Vālmiki*, we find a comprehensive coverage of this concept developed on a far higher and almost a global perspective. Starting with the national and human culture of public administration nurtured by the devoted and dedicated ruler *Daśaratha*, the poet takes us through an infinite variety of cultures including sage-culture, vedic-culture, work-culture, family-culture, royal-culture, rural-culture, tribal-culture, animal-culture, bird-culture, forest-culture, terrorist-culture, consumption-culture, submissive-culture, water-culture, wind-culture, space-culture, thought-culture, speech-culture, action-culture, and so on. If we start citing instances of these various cultures, the entire story will be told. What is relevant to note and appreciate at this point is the marvellous way in which all these cultures were woven into a fine fabric of life by the composite personality of *Rāma*. Starting from *Ayodhyā*, his march upto *Laṅkā* covers different areas where these cultures manifested themselves. He mingles with the representatives of these cultures and gave them a human touch making human culture more dignified than even the culture of the gods and the godmen. The most touching example of his accomodative spirit in respect of cultural diversity is his alliance with *Vibhīṣaṇa*, his friendship with *Sugrīva*, his sympathy for *Rāvaṇa* for whom he had a genuine admiration for his extraordinary valour and invincible courage and conviction. He treats the tribal leader *Niṣāda (Guha)* as a personal friend and embraces him. He performs the funeral rites for *Jatāyu*

though unable to do so for his own father. He tolerates *Kaikeyī* and tells *Bharata* not to misunderstand her. He cares more for the coronation of *Vibhīṣaṇa* than for his own re-union with *Jānakī* immediately after the battle was won. He makes his wife walk through the lanes of *Laṅkā*. He refuses to enter any town like *Kiṣkindhā* and *Laṅkā* till he completes his full period of exile. He accepts the divine aircraft, the *Puṣpakā*, – for the sole compelling need to return to *Ayodhyā* before the due date lest his brother *Bharata* should end his life by surrendering his physical body to the sacred fire. But immediately after reaching *Ayodhyā*, he sends it back to its rightful owner *Kubera* from whom his brother *Rāvaṇa* had grabbed without any regard for propriety in matter of property. This surprises even *Vibhīṣaṇa* who recollects the characteristic smile of *Rāma* while accepting the offer. This is the type of culture that *Vālmīki* breathes into his characters, particularly the two main characters *Rāma* and *Sītā*.

THE BHAKTI CULTURE

Gosvāmī Tulasī Dāsa too presents the cultural aspect of the story from a purely devotional point of view. Infact devotion or *bhakti* is the highest form of culture as it purifies the heart of the devotee and establishes his perfect identification with the deity. As the devotee advances in his capacity to visualise divinity, potentially present in all individuals, the cultural values automatically get internalised. This is what *Tulasī* calls saturated devotion (*nirbharā bhakti*) and what the *Gītā* depicts as undivided (*ananya*) *bhakti*. *Vālmīki* characterises this *parama prīti*

(the most refined form of love). Infact devotion is a product formed by the spontaneous synthesis of pure love and unquestionable faith. We find this devotional culture predominant in hundreds of works written on the theme of the *Rāmāyana* in Sanskrit and other vernaculars.

Vālmīki depicts *Hanumān* as an ideal devotee blending his acts of devotion with awareness, obedience and execution. *Mānasa* too does not lag behind; rather goes a step forward to place the devotee sometimes at the doorstep and sometimes at the centre of the sanctum sanctorum of the deity Himself. No wonder if the servant excels his master in some respects. *Tulasī* gives an example of *Rāma* trying to cross the ocean with the help of a bridge while *Hanumān* just takes off by his own propulsion. *Tulasī* also places *Hanumān* (*kapīśvara*) at par with *Vālmīki* (*kavīśvara*). The common trait in these two seems to be their mastery over communication skills. *Gosvāmī* must have meticulously observed how *Vālmīki*, himself an exemplary exponent of the intricacies of speech shaped his favourite character *Hanumān* as his mouthpiece. Both are splendid specimens of word-culture.

CULTURE OF THE WORD

Of all the types of cultures depicted in the *Rāmāyana*, word-culture is the most suitable and also the most relevant one for the modern world. It is the word that creates the world. So the seers and the saints who handled the theme of *Rāmāyana* paid special attention to this aspect of word-culture so as to imbue in the readers of *Rāmāyana*

this culture of using the most powerful instrument of speech for their own satisfaction and for others delight.

When *Hanumān* meets *Rāma* for the first time on the outskirts of *Kiṣkindhā*, on the banks of Lake *Pampā*, what impresses *Rāma* most is his art of speaking. It appeared to *Rāma* as if it was not *Hanumān* that was speaking but his heart. This is the language of the heart which *Hanumān* cultivated and which pleases *Rāma* most. More than the content conveyed, the manner in which *Māruti* presents it adds dignity to the diction. *Rāma* exclaims at *Hanumān*'s skill in speaking, and tells his brother *Lakṣmaṇa*, 'Look, how marvelously he speaks ! He has not spoken a single syllable without singnificance, he has not wasted a single word nor has he missed an appropriate word. He has not taken more time than his ideas needed. Every word that he spoke can never be forgotten. Such a speech promotes general good and remains forever in the minds and hearts of generations to come.'

In the light of what *Rāma* has said about *Hanumān*'s speech, one can easily see why *Gosvāmī* equates *Hanumān* with *Vālmīki*. Again when *Hanumān* sees *Jānakī* for the first time in the *Aśoka* garden of *Rāvaṇa*, *Hanumān* exclaims, 'To find *Sītā* here is just like listening to a person devoid of word culture — who tries to say something and actually says something else'.

The emphasis on word-culture can be seen in almost all characters of *Vālmīki* including minor characters like *Śabari*, *Svayamprabhā* and *Trijaṭa* and also *Kumbhakarna* who sounds highly cultured in his presentation of an

intricate problem and its practical solution to his adamant elder brother, *Rāvaṇa*. A careful study of *Vālmīki* from this point of view is bound to promote word-culture in the modern world which is facing a communication crisis, in the socio-political scene.

ROLE MODELS

Besides *Rāma*, *Sītā* and *Hanumān*, there are some major characters whose life and attitude towards life have an ocean of message to convey for the betterment of humanity. Most outstanding among them is *Bharata* whom *Vālmīki* calls *Bhrātṛ Vatsala* (favourite brother of *Rāma*). Brother *Lakṣmaṇa* is also equally dear and near to *Rāma*, but there is a difference between the two. *Vālmīki* makes out this subtle difference between the two brothers by keeping one very close both physically and temperamentally while the other enjoys not only affection but also admiration of the eldest brother. That is why *Vālmīki* calls *Lakṣmaṇa Lakṣmī Vardhana* (one who promotes grace and grandeur). Even the youngest one, *Śatrughna*, is not ignored. He is *Nitya Śatrughna* (one who puts an end to the eternal enmity within and without). *Rāma*, the chosen man of *Vālmīki* is, of course, *Satya Parākrama* (one whose strength lies in his truth). Thus the four attributes given to the four brothers communicate the composite — culture nurtured by their elevated thinking, noble functioning and ennobling words.

In magnanimity, simplicity and humanity, *Bharata* ranks highest partly because of the ordeal to which he was subjected by unexpected turn of events. The shocking news,

of *Rāma*'s sudden exile immediately following the proposed coronation first upsets the father, then mother *Kausalyā*, thereafter the entire *Ayodhyā* and finally the innocent and devoted brother *Bharata*. *Bharata* had to establish his innocence and dedication to his noble brother before everyone. He had to convince *Kausalyā* first, then *Vasiṣṭha*, later even a sage like *Bharadvāja* and ultimately the perplexed and perturbed audience at *Citrakūṭa*. *Rāma* however needed no explanation. Rather, he himself tried to explain the background of the sudden change in events and justify the stand taken by him when truth and justice stood face to face in the baffling battle of human values. The dialouge between *Rāma* and *Bharata* in *Citrakūṭa* is a monumental discourse on human values in which both the brothers fight for their right not to rule but to reject their legitimate power. Both of them had a claim upon the Kingdom in their own way, but neither of them wanted to exercise it for it went against all canons of propriety. Ultimately they found a solution to the poser in the pious feet of *Rāma* whose golden touch charges the wooden sandals with an enchantment that provide guidance to *Bharata* for full fourteen years in all practical aspects of public administration.

The scene dominated by the dialogue between two strong advocates of eternal truth and immediate justice is an excellent illustration of practical philosophy less preached and more practised in thought, word and action. There are very few instances when *Rāma* of *Vālmiki* preaches. The sermon on the mount *Citrakūṭa* is an exception. On seeing *Bharata* approaching *Rāma*, even from

that distance, could discern a prince for whom propriety had a priority over power, and who has come to plead for that propriety which should not be sacrificed even if it leads to momentary injustice. The words used and the thoughts expressed by the two brothers amidst the sages and citizens of *Ayodhyā* and *Citrakūṭa* articulate the lasting message that the *Rāmāyaṇa* has for society. Here lies a lesson which the modern world will be wise in taking from this great epic, particularly at a time when consumption, accumulation, exploitation, isolation, aggression, abuse and misuse have crept into the society eroding our cultural and human values.

If *Rāma* stands for truth, *Bharata* stands for justice, *Lakṣmaṇa* for duty and *Śatrughna* for humility. Besides these four brothers, we have other exemplifying figures. The three mothers - *Kausalyā*, *Sumitrā* and *Kaikeyī* stand respectively for modesty, magnanimity and determination. Other women-characters like *Ahalyā*, *Anasūyā*, *Śabarī*, *Tārā*, *Mandodarī* and *Svayamprabhā* also have their own philosophy of life which can educate the modern world if properly understood. *Svayamprabhā* is a character neglected by most authors; but she is the most mystic, magnificent yet modest character who helps *Hanumān* and his friends searching for *Sītā* in getting out of a critical situation. She literally leads them from utter darkness of a closed cave to the broad daylight illuminating the inquisitive waves of the ocean which bridges the gulf between *Rāma*, the mission, and *Sītā*, the vision.

Even an ordinary woman named *Trijaṭā* visualises the ultimate victory of *Sītā* and cautions her fellow

watch-women against thinking ill of her as the future of *Laṅkā* depended on her mercy. Her words come true. Her narration of the dream she saw in the early hours of the day sounds like the sacred *mantra*, *Gāyatrī*. The semantic similarity between the two words — *Trijaṭā* and *Gāyatrī* — is also worth our attention and contemplation.

This reminds us of the metaphysical message that *Rāmāyaṇa* has to convey to those who have the necessary background. The entire *Rāmāyaṇa* consisting of 24,000 verses is, in a way, an enlarged expression of *Gāyatrī* with its 24 key syllables (*bījākṣaras*), each syllable permeating through a thousand verses. This is another dimension of this celebrated work which saint-poets like *Tulasī* not only grasped fully but tried to recreate it in their own compositions. For instance, the phrases like *Sakala Kālā*, *Viśuddha Vijñāna* and even the words *Mānasa* and *Mangala* have deep significance behind them.

THE MESSAGE OF RĀMĀYAṆA

The last word that can be said about the message of the *Rāmāyaṇa* to the modern world is its emphasis on general good (*Śubham*) as distinguished from its counter-concept of victory (*Jayam*) which forms the main thrust of the *Mahābhārata*. The *Rāmāyaṇa* provides the corpus for Indian culture while *Mahābhārata* fortifies it with the mind that is basically Indian but essentially human. These two works produced by two masterminds of the world have served as supplementary readers for the students of literature and culture through the ages. The purport of such works transcends time and space. They are for all time to come and for all people in the world. This world may be

modern and the words bequeathed by these world-figures archaic, but it is not antiquated, or dated as what they advocate is Absolute Truth.

The message of *Rāmāyaṇa* is perhaps more meaningful to the modern world than to the ancient or medieval world as the modernity that we are proud of has been concentrating more on material prosperity, consumption of earthly pleasures even at the cost of the protection and preservation of the earth itself (which is gradually turning into an *agnigarbhā* from the good old stature of *ratnagarbhā*) and projection of self at the expense of fellow-beings. *Vālmiki* uses a very beautiful word *Mādhavī* to convey the magnanimity and potentiality of the Mother Earth who produced a darling daughter, *Jānakī*, who was dearer to the world than to the earth. She found her peer in *Rāma*, a jewel among the great rulers of the *Sūryavaṁśa*. The union of *Rāma* and *Sītā* is therefore an everlasting one of heaven and earth, light and soil, truth and beauty, mission and vision and above all of the Man, the embodiment of *Dharma*, and the Woman, Chastity personified. What we need today are not more mansions but men with vision and infinite virtues committed to the sole mission of promoting happy living in a peaceful world. That is the only answer to all the problems threatening the very existence of the terrestrial stability and celestial serenity in the modern world. Human development, non-violence, sacrifice, simplicity, integrity in the thought, word and deed and a firm faith in human dignity are the assets that *Rāmāyaṇa* has given us. It is our duty to preserve them so that we in turn are preserved.

RĀMA THE EMBODIMENT OF DHARMA

Even an average student of *Rāmāyaṇa* knows that *Rāma* has been described in the celebrated work *Rāmāyaṇa* of *Vālmīki* as an embodiment of *dharma* or righteousness. (*rāmo vighrahavān dharmah*) is an oft-quoted line from *Vālmīki*. But very few people notice or try to trace out the source from which this popular observation emanated. It is surprising to find that of all the characters in *Rāmāyaṇa* it was *Mārīca* who pronounced this tribute to *Rāma* as a piece of advice to *Rāvaṇa*, who had sought his help in the heinous act of abducting *Sītā*. *Mārīca*, who had earlier had a bitter taste of *Rāma*'s valour and had narrowly escaped death trembles at the very idea of facing *Rāma*. Facing him means facing death according to *Mārīca*. Coupled with this deep-rooted fear, *Mārīca* had great admiration for the righteousness of *Rāma* and considered him in his heart of hearts a personification of *dharma*. He was also convinced that victory and virtue always went hand in hand. It was this feeling of reverence that prompted *Mārīca* to make this observation which attracted the attention of all except *Rāvaṇa* as he was destined to pay the price of his evil deeds and ideas in his encounter with *Rāma*.

The name of *Rāma* is closely associated with *dharma* throughout his life in all his thoughts, words and deeds. In the very first chapter when *Vālmīki* tries to know from *Nārada* whether an ideal man of his vision existed in the world and *Nārada* readily points to *Rāma*, the word *dharmajña* (exponent of *dharma*) occurs both in the query

and in the answer. While explaining the nature of *dharma* advocated, practised and realised by *Rāma*, *Nārada* says :

rakṣitā jīvalokasya dharmasya parirakṣitā |
rakṣitā svasya dharmasya svajanasya ca rakṣitā ||

Rāma's main ambition or aspiration in life was to protect not only human race but also all living beings inhabiting this earth by preserving *dharma*. This protection of the universe through preservation of *dharma* extends from his own self and reaches out to the world outside through his relationship with his family members. This observation made by *Nārada* indicates the importance of family as a primary social unit leading to physical well-being and harmonious development of the individual and his environment. *Nārada* being a shrewd observer of human nature visualises a possible conflict between this basic *dharma* and the eternal truth (*satya*) and, therefore, says that *Rāma* will act like a representative of *dharma* in matters relating to Truth (*satye dharma ivāparaḥ*). This also indicates his strength of determination in upholding truth (*satyam*) and protecting the right (*dharma*). The entire course of events in *Rāmāyaṇa* is an elaborate explanation and illustration of this basic virtue of *Rāma*.

The first act which *Rāma* was commissioned to perform at the instance and under the inspiring guidance of the great sage *Viśvāmitra* was to protect *dharma* by keeping the demons away from a righteous act. While requesting *Daśaratha* to depute his son for this noble mission, *Viśvāmitra* says

*yadi te dharmatābhaṁ tu yaśāśca paramaṁ bhuvi |
sthīramicchasi rājendra rāmaṁ me dātumarhasi ||*

(If you are interested in the promotion of *dharma* and the lasting reputation for your rule in this world, you will do well to entrust your son to me for this cause).

Out of fond attachment to his son born in old age *Daśaratha* hesitates to part with him even for a short period of ten days. When *Viśvāmitra* gets offended on this impertinent and curt reply of *Daśaratha*, *Vasiṣṭha* tries to convince the king of the noble intentions of the sage and says that *Rāma* will be not only safe, but will grow stronger and richer both in physical and spiritual terms. In this context *Vasiṣṭha* describes *Viśvāmitra* as *vigrahavān dharma* (embodiment of *dharma*), the same attribute used for *Rāma*. Thus one embodiment of *dharma* meets the other and the result was the formation of a good match of *dharma* in the union of *Rāma* and his rightly acquired spouse *Sītā*.

Now *Dharmacārī* gets a companion *Sahadharmacārī* in the words of king *Janaka* who says at the time of handing over his daughter *Sītā* to *Rāma* :

iyam sītā mama sūtā sahadharmacārī tava |

(This my daughter *Sītā* will henceforth keep company with you in all the righteous acts you perform).

It is significant to note that *Rāma*'s acts were never subjected to any criticism even by his opponents as long as he was accompanied by *Sītā*. It was only when he was alone as a bachelor and when he was separated from her

by *Rāvaṇa* that he killed *Tāḍakā* a woman and *Vālī*, who was not a direct opponent for him.

When *Rāma* is united with *Sītā*, his personality grows a little higher and broader and the *dharmajña* that he already was now becomes *dharmakāmārtha tattvajña*, (one who understands the implications of *dharma* and *kāma*.) A severe test for this awareness is witnessed when *Rāma* is asked to leave *Ayodhyā* for *Daṇḍaka* forests for full fourteen years. But *Rāma* comes out of the ordeal in a moment by readily accepting the proposal and *Sītā* excels him in her devotion to *dharma* by voluntarily offering her services to her Lord during his exile and to achieve this objective she prevails upon her husband to take her with him to the forests at all costs. She proves herself to be a real companion (*sahacarī*) both in *dharma* as well as in *kāma*.

What is surprising in this case is that *Rāma* and *Sītā* who pay the price for their devotion to *dharma* take pleasure in doing so and do not get agitated even in the adverse circumstances. The most tragic penalty is paid by the poor king *Daśaratha* who faces a life-taking conflict between the promise he made and the justice he seeks. It is interesting to find that *Kaikeyī* takes shelter under truth while *Daśaratha* pleads for justice and *Rāma* finds a practical compromise for both. That is why he emerges as *satya dharma parākrama* (a master marcher on the path of both truth and justice). It appears as if he has adopted truth and justice as his two eyes which guide him throughout his march of life. In fact the *Rāmāyaṇa* presents a picturesque vision of this march.

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The conflict between *Kaikeyī* and *Daśaratha* is a conflict between truth and justice. *Kaikeyī* was originally a great admirer of *Rāma* and his devotion to *dharma*. On hearing the news of his coronation, she jumps with joy and endorses the idea of offering him the crown in a spontaneous manner by saying :

dharmajño guṇavān dāntaḥ kṛtajñaḥ satyavāñchuciḥ |
rāmo rājasuto jyeṣṭho yauvarājyamato'rhati ||

The very first word spoken by *Kaikeyī* in praise of *Rāma* is *dharmajña*. *Rāma* is aware of his *dharma*; he is virtuous, restrained, grateful, truthful and as pious as fire. Enumerating these qualities, *Kaikeyī* declares him most suitable to succeed the throne. Above all, she says that he is the eldest not only in birth but also in worth. *Daśaratha* later quotes *Kaikeyī* as often remarking 'he is our beloved and the eldest son, eldest in respect of *dharma* too'.

sa me jyeṣṭhasutaḥ śrīmān dharmajyeṣṭha itīva me |

Such a noble lady suddenly changes her mind and insists on her son *Bharata* to be crowned on the same day and *Rāma* to be sent to the forests for full fourteen years. What is more surprising is that she takes shelter under the same justice (*dharma*) which according to her is subservient to truth (*satyam*). She is however confused in her heart of hearts though outwardly she tries to justify her stand saying that truth is supreme and in truth lies justice too (*satye dharma pratishṭhitah*). That is why she concludes her plea in utter despair and disgust by saying :

*bhavatvadharmo dharmo vā satyaṁ vā yadi vāṇṛtam |
yattvayā sanśrutam mahyaṁ tasya nāsti vyatikramaḥ ||*

(Be it right or wrong, truth or untruth, whatever you had promised me in good faith, that shall stand and shall not be reversed).

Daśaratha, dedicated to truth in thought, word and deed at all costs, finds himself helpless and exclaims in utter dismay.

yadi satyaṁ bravīmyetat tad-asatyaṁ bhaviṣyati |

(If I speak the truth, that becomes the untruth).

dharmabandhena baddho'smi naṣṭā ca mama cetanā |

(I am tied down to *dharma* and I have lost my sense).

This conflict between truth and justice though causes terrible strain to the nerves of both the hard hearted queen *Kaikeyī* and the helplessly tender monarch *Daśaratha* eases itself in a moment when *Rāma*, the embodiment of *dharma*, enters into the scene. When *Kaikeyī* breaks out the truth with lot of hesitation, *Rāma* feels distressed and fails to understand why there should be so much of hesitation on the part of his parents to spell out such a simple thing. As soon as he hears the desire of *Kaikeyī* from her own mouth, he responds readily to her command without a trace of surprise or sorrow on his face by saying :

evamastu gamiṣyāmi vanaṁ vastumahaṁ tvitaḥ |

(Be it so and here I proceed to the forests right now).

When *Kaikeyī* expresses her anxiety that there should be no delay in the execution of the King's orders conveyed

through her, *Rāma* makes a remarkable statement which speaks volumes about his selfless dedication to duty and a strong sense of determination. He says :

nāham-arthaparo devi lokamāvastum-utsahe |
viddhi māmṛṣibhistulyaṁ vimalaṁ dharmamāsthitaṁ ||

(Mother, I am not interested in the material possession. The world at large awaits my association. I am dedicated to my duty with as pure a mind as possessed by the great sages whose blessings I am looking for).

Rāma's sense of dedication to duty undergoes a greater ordeal when he tries to convince his mother *Kausalyā* that he should leave for the forests at all costs. He tells her in a polite but binding terminology :

dharmo hi paramo loka dharme satyaṁ pratiṣṭhitaṁ |
dharmā-saṁśritaṁ-apyetat piturvacanam-uttamam ||
tvayā mayā ca vaidehyā lakṣmaṇena sumitrayā |
piturniyoge sthātavyameṣa dharmah sanātanaḥ ||

(*dharmā* is supreme in the world and in *dharmā* lies *satyaṁ*, the truth. What father has pronounced is quite in conformity with *dharmā* and is therefore a binding verdict for all of us — myself, yourself, *Sītā*, *Lakṣmaṇa* and *Sumitrā*).

It may be of interest to compare the above observation about *dharmā* with what *Kaikeyī* had earlier said about truth. She had said, *satye dharmah pratiṣṭhitaḥ* (*dharmā* lies in truth), while *Rāma* remarks here, *dharme satyaṁ pratiṣṭhitaṁ* (*in dharmā* lies truth). What was truth for *Kaikeyī* becomes *dharmā* for *Rāma*. It

is only an embodiment of *dharma* like *Rāma* who sees truth and *dharma* with equal respect and reverence, that can bring about such an equation between what is right (*dharma*) and what is true (*satyam*).

The trial for *Rāma*'s devotion and dedication to truth and righteousness is not yet over. He faces a more testing trial in *Citrakūṭa* when *Bharata* supported by the whole of *Ayodhyā* including the sage *Vasiṣṭha* pleads to reverse his decision and return to *Ayodhyā* to accept the kingdom that belongs to him by virtue of *dharma*. *Bharata* calls him *param dharmajña* (the knower of the highest *dharma* in the world). *Vasiṣṭha* addresses *Rāma* as *satya dharma parākramah* (one who marches with a balanced tread placing one foot on truth and the other on righteousness). The puzzling quiz finds a peaceful solution in the sandals (*pādukās*) sanctified by the sacred feet of *Rāma*. *Bharata* returns to *Ayodhyā* to rule his subjects and *Rāma* proceeds to the forests to achieve his object. Both follow the path of truth and righteousness supported by selfless love and spontaneous sense of duty.

Rāma's life-companion, *Sītā* also tries to assimilate the right conduct (*dharma*) of her husband on various occasions. When *Rāma* hesitates to take her with him to the forests, she pleads only on the strength of *dharma* and wins her case towards the end. Pleased with the pleasing qualities of his spouse, *Rāma* says in the end :

anugacchasva mām bhīru sahadharmacarī bhava |

(Well, then, come along with me and give me company in matters of performing *dharma*).

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In this line, *Rāma* only repeats what *Janaka* had told him at the time of their marriage, while placing *Jānakī* in his hands. It is also significant to note that the blessings of *Janaka - bhadram te* (may this moment be auspicious to you throughout your life) had a world of significance in the later events in their life.

Mother *Kausalyā* while parting with her son with eyes full of tears expresses more or less a similar wish :

yam pālayasi dharmam tvam prītyā ca niyamena ca |
sa vai rāghavaśārdūla dharmas-tyāmabhirakṣatu ||

(Oh, my valiant son *Rāghava* ! The righteousness i.e. *dharma* that you have been following all these days with love and dedication shall protect you throughout).

In their dedication to what is right and just, the ideal couple *Rāma* and *Sītā* excel one another. When *Rāma* takes a pledge that he will destroy the demons in the *Daṇḍaka* forest to ensure security, peace and prosperity to the sages, *Sītā* expresses her doubt whether *Rāma* was justified in taking such a stand of harming those who have not harmed him. *Rāma* makes his stand clear while appreciating the point raised by his fitting life-companion. The later events in *Rāmāyaṇa* amply illustrate this stand taken by *Rāma* to uphold *dharma* on the basis of truth and justice.

There are however some instances in the *Rāmāyaṇa* which create some sort of suspicion even in the minds of the greatest admirers of *Rāma*. For instance, the unwanted and the light hearted treatment given to *Śurpaṇakhā* without any consideration for her sex or straight forwardness, the questionable timidity and cruelty shown in killing *Vālī* from

behind a tree, the unfair means adopted in killing *Indrajit* are some of the instances subjected to both severe and soft criticism by the critics as well as admirers of *Rāma*. The answer to all these queries can be found in the clarification given by *Rāma* to his spouse *Sītā*. According to him, the protection of *ṛsis* who in turn protect *dharma* is his primary duty, in the performance of which he is prepared to ignore everything else — his own life, his wife, brother and anything else — no matter how dear it is to him.

apyaham jīvitam jahyām tvām vā sīte salakṣmaṇām |

This reminds us of *Bhavabhūti*'s oft quoted verse which again comes from *Rāma* :

sneham dayā ca saukhyam ca yadi vā jānakīmapi |
ārāadhanāya lokasya muñcato nāsti me vyathā ||

'In order to establish popular justice and offer service to humanity', says *Rāma*, 'I am prepared to give up friendship, mercy, individual happiness and if necessary even my life-companion *Sītā*.' It is this devotion to duty or service to humanity that accounts for the paradoxical behaviour in *Rāma* which to our mind appears to be a little out of the way.

The episode of *Śurpaṅkhā* sows the seed for the entire course of events that follow. The fanciful desire of *Sītā* for the golden deer helps its growth. The association with *Sugrīva* and the assassination of *Vālī* give clearance to further development. Ultimately the killing of *Rāvaṇa* completes the process of destroying the evil and promoting the good. Even then *Rāma*'s mission is not complete. He

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makes his wife *Sītā* realise her mistake and her unpardonable injustice done to his devoted and innocent brother *Lakṣmaṇa*. She is made to experience the agony that *Lakṣmaṇa* might have undergone when *Sītā* drives him by force to join *Rāma* even at the cost of false allegation against a devoted companion like *Lakṣmaṇa*. He does not spare even his kith and kin when it comes to the question of upholding justice.

These are the supernatural qualities of *Rāma* which elevate him to the plane of divine humanity which can in other words be termed, transcendental divinity. Whether *Rāma* was God or man, it hardly matters. But what matters is his devotion to duty and dedication to truth which make him more divine than God and more human than man.

He illustrates the vedic truth which proclaims man as the ultimate beyond which there is nothing—

puruṣāṇna paraṁ kiñcīt sā kāṣṭhā sā parāgatih |

STRĪ-DHARMA IN THE RĀMAYĀṆA

Dharma, the basis for existence of the entire universe is a very broad concept applicable not only to men and women but even to birds and animals and other minor beings of this vast creation. It is the key to success not only to the creation but even to the Creator. He is also governed by his own *dharma* which is supreme and governs the various facets of *dharma* obtained at various levels of creation. The very word *dharma* means the basis that supports the phenomenal world. A very peculiar characteristic of *dharma* is that it protects those by whom it is protected. The time-honoured epic *Rāmāyaṇa* of sage *Vālmīki* provides an illustrious example of this basic concept of humanity known as *dharma*.

When we analyse the concept of *dharma* as propounded by *Vālmīki* in his *Rāmāyaṇa*, we find that it forms the very basis not only for the entire story but even for the name *Rāmāyaṇa*. The word *Rāmāyaṇa* means for a superficial reader just the story of *Rāma*. But there is a deeper significance in this name given by *Vālmīki* to his work. The word has become so familiar to us with the passage of time that we do not go into the minute composition of the words that constitute this compound name *Rāmāyaṇa*. A careful analysis of the word tells us that it is the story not only of *Rāma* but also of *Sītā* in a coordinated and cooperative spirit. They are inseparable. They live together, think together, act together and proceed together even when they are physically separated. Referring to this, *Vālmīki* says even in the very first canto :

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rāmasya dayitā bhāryā nityam prāṇa samāhitā |

It is interesting to note that we often think of *Sītā* and *Rāma* whenever we want to cite an example of ideal couple. But perhaps nobody would like to live the life of either *Rāma* or *Sītā*. The reason is simple. Their matrimonial life was full of trouble, turmoil, disturbance, dislocation, disaster and even near destruction. At every stage they had to struggle for existence but survived ultimately because of the righteousness in their behaviour. It should be noted that the marriage or the union of *Rāma* and *Sītā*, was brought about by the sagacious mediator *Viśvāmitra*. It is more significant particularly because *Viśvāmitra* was a sage who visualised the sacred *Gāyatrī*, the mother of all *Vedas*. The motive behind the marriage was not gratification of passionate love but the realisation of higher values of life through the performance of one's duty in a righteous way. It was not a marriage in the secular sense of the term. It is a sacred duty entrusted to the young couple by the preceptor or the parents, it was acceptable to both because it was acceptable to their well-wishers. The words uttered by *Janaka* while placing *Sītā* in the hands of *Rāma* are full of significance :

'iyam sītā mama sūtā sahadharmacharī tava' |

(Here is *Sītā*, my daughter who will accompany you in the performance of all righteous deeds.)

Soon after the marriage, the proposed coronation of *Rāma* suddenly stands cancelled due to some unforeseen course of events. Such a course of events could have up-set

an ordinary individual but both *Rāma* and *Sītā* take it very sportively and *Sītā* rises to the occasion far above the level of her husband. When *Rāma* hesitates to take her to the forests, she assures him that she will not be a burden to him in any respect, but on the other hand she will try to pave the way for his path of righteousness during the difficult days ahead. She does not even hesitate to tell him, without any prejudice to her humility and propriety that it was not becoming of a prince like *Rāma* to hesitate to take his wife to the forests apprehending some untoward incident.

In the company of *Rāma* even the horrifying forests of *Daṇḍaka* became pleasant picnic spots for the sportive girl *Jānakī*. She finds herself more comfortable in the forests than in *Ayodhyā* or *Mithilā* because she is all the time blessed with the pleasant company of *Rāma*.

bāleṇa ramate sītā bālacandra nibhānānā |
rāmā rāmehyadīnātmā vijanepi vane saṁ ||

But as fate would have it, the course of events suddenly takes the unexpected and untoward turn. She is separated from her beloved and taken to a far-off place—far away from her partner. The temptations offered by *Rāvaṇa* were so alluring that an ordinary woman, in that situation, would have easily fallen prey to them; but *Jānakī*, as a fitting companion of *Rāma*, cannot think of anything except the possibility however remote it might be, of her re-union with *Rāma*. Apparently, there was no such possibility, not even a ray of hope coming from any corner. She is surrounded by the ugly faces of the demons all

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around her, but her mental eyes are fixed on *Rāma* eagerly looking forward to the pleasure of seeing him and the only hope, on which she is banking, is her righteous behaviour, pious heart and the crystal clear conscience. Ultimately her desire gets fulfilled though she had to undergo another fiery ordeal even after the physical re-union. The union of *Rāma* and *Sītā* is not one dimensional. It is not just physical, not even mental alone. It is physical, mental and spiritual.

Not only *Jānakī*, but even the other women characters in *Vālmiki* are closely connected or associated with the main character *Rāma*. They represent various facets of *dharma*. Their attitude towards *Rāma* is a manifestation of their approach to righteousness because *Rāma* is righteousness personified. (*rāmo vigrahavān dharmah*). In order to understand the concept of *dharma* in the *Rāmāyaṇa* as reflected in various women characters in *Vālmiki*, it is therefore necessary to study the role played by them and their inter-action with *Rāma*, the main figure in the story.

His position differs from person to person. For *Jānakī*, he is a loyal husband and an ideal life companion. For *Kausalyā*, he is an innocent child unexposed to the atrocities and aberrations of the selfish world. For *Kaikeyī*, unfortunately he becomes an object of jealousy though in the initial stages, he enjoys her affection and tender feelings in greater measure than those of *Kausalyā*. For *Sumitrā*, he presents a peculiar figure combining both affection and admiration. He becomes a saviour and benefactor to the

down trodden and fate-stricken *Ahalyā*. He is next to God for her. *Anasūyā* does not seem to be directly interested in *Rāma*, but she imparts her affectionate blessings through the young girl *Sītā*. *Rāma* feels blessed when *Jānakī* receives her profuse blessings in the form of divine garments and some peculiar cosmetics of eternal fragrance. Apart from these gifts, the greatest gift of *Anasūyā* is her genuine affection which fortifies *Sītā* against all her future dangers. The attitude of *Sūrpaṇakhā* is altogether different. She has all admiration for *Rāma* but wants to win him over at the cost of *Sītā*. Her attempts to achieve her sexual satisfaction at the cost of *dharma* not only fail miserably, but even rebound on her with terrible re-action. Through her *Rāvaṇa* also becomes a victim to this unbecoming act which goes against the canons of law – not only the secular law but even the Eternal law which can be described as *ṛtaṁ* or *dharma*. *Śabarī* comes very close to the heart of *Rāma*. She is described as an embodiment of unqualified devotion to *Rāma*. Her only life-ambition was to see him once in her life-time. Having seen him, she merges, as it were, in the ocean of love springing from the sparkling eyes of *Rāma*.

There are two women characters, *Tārā* and *Mandodarī*, who have a peculiar admiration for *Rāma*. What *Rāma* has done to them is not something which they should cherish or appreciate. In fact they were deprived of the matrimonial happiness by *Rāma*. Nothing can take the place of a husband for a dutiful wife and that was denied to them by *Rāma*. But still they have great admiration for him because he has done what is right without any consideration for the

consequences. They are able to appreciate him because of their righteousness of a very high order. These two ladies, *Tārā* and *Mandodarī*, rise above the level of ordinary women. It requires great courage and conviction to appreciate what is right from an impersonal angle.

There are two more women characters who are not directly connected with *Rāma* but they have a role to play in promoting the cause of truth and righteousness followed by *Rāma* and his admirers. One of them is *Svayāṃprabhā*, living in an isolated cave. *Hanumān* and his party enter into this cave in course of their quest for *Sītā*. This woman with mysterious powers entertains *Hanumān* and others, offers them timely hospitality and also helps them in finding their way towards the object of their quest. She is the least known woman, yet the most prominent character in *Rāmāyaṇa* promoting the cause of *Rāma*. The other character is *Trijaṭā* who keeps company and consoles *Sītā* throughout her period of stay in *Laṅkā*. She is kept in watch by *Rāvaṇa* not only to ensure the safe custody of *Sītā* but also to make all possible attempts to convince her in his favour. But *Trijaṭā* being clear in her conscience dreams what is going to happen in the days to come. She is able to visualise the ultimate victory of *Rāma* and the consequent downfall and destruction of *Rāvaṇa*. When *Rāvaṇa* tries to mis-inform *Sītā* about the reported collapse of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* in the battle-field, *Trijaṭā* takes her into confidence and tells her that *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* are happily alive because the aircraft, *Puspaka*, which is carrying them is not supposed to carry any lady whose

husband is not alive. There is no occasion for *Trijaṭā* to come into direct contact with *Rāma* but her constant stay with *Sītā* who is only the vision of *Rāma* links her with the main character.

In the ultimate analysis, we find that except two characters, *Kaikeyī* and *Śūrpaṇakhā*, all the other major characters in *Rāmāyaṇa* act in accordance with the canons of law and justice. But it is worth noting that without the intervention of these two characters, namely, *Kaikeyī* and *Śūrpaṇakhā*, the story would not have taken the course it has actually taken. *Mantharā* need not necessarily be the maid servant of *Kaikeyī*, tempting her to take the wrong path. There is always a conflict going on in the human conscience between what is right and what is wrong. Out of selfishness, we find the wrong direction more convenient and beneficial, forgetting that in the long run only the right wins. Thus, *Mantharā*, as the name indicates is a mental phase of *Kaikeyī*, churning the ocean of her conscience only to bring forth poison out of it.

In case of *Śūrpaṇakhā*, whose main contribution lies in extending the course of events to the court of *Rāvaṇa*, bringing out thereby the complete extention of events, is entirely different. There is nothing good in her. All evil ideas are personified in her. But even such a character approaches *Rāma* and expresses her love for him.

Thus, almost all the women characters in *Vālmiki* are directly or indirectly associated with the mission of *Rāma* — the mission being to uphold righteousness and follow the

path of Eternal Truth. *Rāma* is appropriately described very frequently by *Vālmīki* as *Satya Dharma Parākrama* meaning that Truth and Justice are the two feet of *Rāma*. Both are equally important for him. He stands for truth and his dharma is taken care of by his vision personified in *Jānakī*. Men and women are thus, two supplementary facets of human life. It is the duty of man to be true to himself and it is the duty of woman to ensure proper performance of *Dharma*. This is the message conveyed by the sage *Vālmīki* through his immortal work *Rāmāyaṇa* .

THE VOICE OF VALMIKI

Speak that which is true and pleasant. Do not speak that which is unpleasant even if it be true. That which is not true should all the more be avoided if it is not pleasant. This is the highest ideal of the art of speaking set by ancient sages. This maxim sounds quite appealing but does not illustrate in a concrete manner the implications involved. It was left to poets gifted with creative genius and prophetic vision to reflect on this injunction and present examples for the wonder and delight of the world. It is in this context that the voice of *Vālmīki*, the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, should be analysed and appreciated.

The voice of *Vālmīki* drew inspiration from a pathetic scene witnessed by him on the banks of the river *Tamāsā*. The separation of a bird from its companion by the act of a cruel hunter aroused pity in the sage whose heart was as pure and clear as the water flowing in the river. The voice of the sage, who was overwhelmed by spontaneous emotion and pious feelings, brought forth, without his being conscious of it, a sweet couplet with simple and charming words arranged in a metrical order. This upsurge of emotion was recollected in tranquillity by the sage and its metrical arrangement was named *Anuṣṭup Chanda* by *Brahmā*, the Author of the Universe. With the blessings and advice of the Creator, *Vālmīki* started narrating the story of *Rāma* which, according to the Creator was destined to survive as long as the rivers flowed and mountains stood. One wonders what is in the epic which makes it imperishable. The answer is simple. The voice of the

unique personality of sage *Vālmiki* derives its universality and immortality from the combination of Truth and Pleasure. This rare blending of Truth and Pleasure is an unprecedented achievement of *Vālmiki*.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, the name given by *Vālmiki* to the story of *Rāma*, presents to the world in stirring language a picture of Truth and Pleasure. If *Rāma* represents Truth, *Sītā* his wife and companion, illustrates how her Pleasure is always a part and parcel of her Lord's Truth. The distance between the two points is only apparent and not real. Truth is her life-breath and it is her Pleasure that breathes life into the Truth of *Rāma*.

A careful study of *Vālmiki* reveals the great care exercised by the poet in portraying these two characters as symbols of Truth (*satyaṁ*) and Pleasure (*priyam*). While referring to *Rāma*, the poet very often uses the word *vākyaviśārada* (an expert in speaking). He conducts his speech in such a way that it is pleasant as well as true. The situations in which he places *Rāma* are all critical, full of trials and temptations. But in every situation, the formula of moderating truth with pleasure works miracles and enables him to get over difficulties without impairing the cause of *dharma* or virtue. It is for this reason that *Vālmiki* describes *Rāma* as another form of *dharma* in his adherence to Truth. He is strong because he is true and truth alone is his strength. He is called *satya parākrama*.

An example will illustrate how skilfully the balance between Truth and Pleasure is maintained. The most unpleasant truth *Rāma* has to face in his life is that it is not

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possible for him to accept *Sītā* back after he had killed *Rāvaṇa* and rescued her. The Truth, in all its naked reality, compelled *Rāma* to reject her unless she proved herself to be chaste. One does not understand why a person like *Rāma* should suspect his virtuous wife. In fact, the average reader is furious at the way *Rāma* treats his beloved after their long separation. Unhesitatingly cold and shutting his eyes to their happy past, he tells her he is sorry, he cannot take her back to *Ayodhyā* after her long incarceration in *Rāvaṇa*'s Palace. He goes a step further and suggests that it is open to her to choose *Vibhīṣaṇa*, *Bharata*, *Sugrīva* or anybody else. This is the most unkind cut of all, for *Sītā* must have expected *Rāma*, the life of her life, to take her into his arms and put an end to the untold sufferings she had to undergo all alone. This reunion is the pleasant aspect of the situation which one would forecast. But the Truth takes an altogether different course. It is, therefore, now for the other aspects, namely 'Pleasure', to react to this problem in a fittingly lofty manner.

Like the simple lady that she is, *Sītā* falls unconscious at *Rāma*'s totally unexpected words, and overwhelmed with sorrow, points out to her husband that what he can see in *Sītā* is only a woman and nothing else. She questions him as to why he did not express these feelings earlier when *Hanumān* had conveyed his message to her. But she does not wait for his reply. She decides to surrender herself to Fire, the purest of elements, confident of successfully withstanding the fiery ordeal if there were any 'Truth' in her. Her 'Pleasure' in surrendering herself in obedience to

the wishes of her Lord brings the Truth to light; the follower of 'Truth' ultimately regains his 'Pleasure'.

This situation is handled by *Vālmīki* in a wonderful manner to show that the union of *Rāma* and *Sītā* represents a unique combination of truth and pleasure and that the blending of the two is possible only when virtue or *dharma* operates as the binding force.

Such instances are present everywhere in the *Rāmāyaṇa* and can be multiplied. The conversations of *Rāma* with *Kaikeyī*, *Daśaratha*, *Kausalyā* and *Sītā* while leaving *Ayodhyā*, present a clear picture of his philosophy of life and of his experiments with Truth. He always experimented with Truth to obtain pleasure for those who had yet to realise the spirit of virtue in life. For himself, he never sought pleasure; it was a thing entirely foreign to him and to his beloved *Sītā*. But what made him pleasant was Truth and not Pleasure. He never used Truth as a means to Pleasure. Truth was for him the means and the end as well. This is the highest ideal of Truth which manifests itself in him, in thought, word and deed.

The *Rāmāyaṇa*, as its name indicates, is essentially the story of *Rāma*, meaning thereby that the character of *Rāma* is the most important in the entire work. In referring to the virtues of *Rāma*, the poet is forthright. He employs every kind of epithet to describe *Rāma's* devotion to Truth and, more than anything else, his urge and capacity to translate Truth into action. The question which the poet poses before *Nārada* also reveals his anxiety to find a

person who has all such qualities as are rarely met with in the world.

The masterpiece of a mastermind is always imbued with some transcendental element and this is true of *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa* also. *Vālmīki* intended to portray an ideal personality in *Rāma* imbued with the highest ideals of truth, pleasure and virtue. But *Sītā*, with her innate simplicity and chastity, takes this place and carries along with her the magnificent epic whose beauty lies in the presentation of an admirable admixture of truth and pleasure. In other words, the voice of *Vālmīki* is the voice of 'Beauty' which *Jānakī*, the daughter of *Janaka* personifies. In this respect *Sītā* is the representative of Womanhood in general and is aptly called *Jānakī*.

A clear justification for the observation made above can be found if we discuss the propriety of the title given to the fifth canto of *Rāmāyaṇa* which is called the *Sundara Kāṇḍa*. What is it that makes it *Sundara* or beautiful? How can we justify this name? Before we advance any categorical justification, it is advisable for us to compare this nomenclature with the names given to the other cantos. The *Bāla Kāṇḍa*, for instance, describes the story of *Rāma* in the early years of his life. The *Ayodhyā*, *Aranya* and *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍas* derive their names from the places in which the action revolves. The *Yuddha Kāṇḍa* centres round an incident. But there is something strange and mysterious about the name *Sundara Kāṇḍa* which is based neither on an incident nor on a place-name or even on a person. On going through the canto, one finds that its central figure is

Sītā. Her devotion to truth and justice is revealed in her differing reactions to the temptations offered to her by *Rāvaṇa* and to the message of her Lord brought by the faithful messenger, *Hanumān*. *Hanumān*, who figures prominently in this canto, contributes only to the glorification of *Sītā*'s character. He reaches *Laṅkā* with the speed of an arrow shot from *Rāma*'s bow and is amazed at the material splendour of the golden land with its lofty palaces and towers and its pageantry and pomp but is utterly disappointed not to find *Sītā* anywhere. *Laṅkā* without his Lord's beloved *Sītā* means nothing to him. Then, when he beholds her sitting beneath a tree with *Rāma*'s name on her lips and tears streaming down her face and she also catches sight of him, his ecstatic joy and devotion find expression in a flood of thankful tears. Blessed indeed are those who can share these sacred feelings of *Hanumān*.

This is the 'Beauty' of the great epic. The spirited manner in which *Sītā* rejects all the temptations offered by *Rāvaṇa* adds lustre to the 'Beauty' of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is *Hanumān* who brings the message of Truth to its faithful follower who is content with Pleasure in its absolute form. Pleasure is thus defined in terms of truth and virtue and not in terms of the material splendour which *Rāvaṇa* personifies. *Sītā*, the symbol of 'Pleasure' and therefore of 'Beauty', totally discards all that is void of Truth and opposed to Truth. Towards the end of the canto we find the whole city of *Laṅkā* burnt by the messenger of Truth, the fire leaving the abode of *Sītā* (the abode of pleasure and beauty) untouched.

It is this Beauty of the in its universal form that the poet Vālmīki sought to depict in his imperishable masterpiece, the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This concept of Beauty appears at its best in *Sundara Kāṇḍa* and hence the name. It is significant to note in this connection that Vālmīki uses the word *sundaram* (beauty) only once in the whole canto and that to describe the palace of *Rāvaṇa*. Perhaps the palace was named *sundaram*. Immediately after speaking of the beauty of *Rāvaṇa*'s palace, Vālmīki refers to *Hanumān*'s great disappointment at not finding *Sītā* anywhere. For him the whole wide world is a void if it does not contain *Sītā*.

This clearly brings out the central theme of this canto, which is, that what is popularly known among the people as beautiful (*sundaram*) and glorious is not really beautiful. Real beauty lies elsewhere. In this context it is also important to note that while referring to *Sītā*, Vālmīki meticulously avoids the use of the word 'beautiful', he only presents a vivid picture of her beauty, both physical and spiritual. She was as if created by the charm of the Gods (*deva māyā*). She is described as *dharmajñā*, *dharma-darśinī*, *tapasvinī*, *manasvinī*, *yaśasvinī* and so on. But she is never called *sundarī*. *Śurpaṇakhā*, while giving a description of *Sītā* to her brother *Rāvaṇa*, calls her *Surūpā*. This deliberate avoidance of the use of the word 'beauty' can be taken to mean that she hardly requires to be described as such because she is 'Beauty' personified, 'Beauty' in the widest sense of the word.

It is only when we realise this aspect of 'Beauty' amply illustrated and glorified in this time-honoured epic that we can appreciate *Rāma*'s words: 'Even if *Laṅkā* is covered with gold, I do not have any fancy for it. Mother and motherland are more to me than heaven itself.' If modern man is capable of being moved by anything, this celebrated work can be the guiding force and inspiration for all time. This is the basic truth which makes the voice of *Vālmīki* eternally beautiful, beauty such that age cannot wither nor custom stale its infinite variety.

AN EPIC FOR ALL

Rāmāyaṇa, the story essentially of *Rāma* and *Sītā* and incidentally of several other characters including not merely men and women, but even birds and animals, angels and ogres, caves and forests and mountains and oceans has an universal appeal. It is not a story confined to one particular race or region. It is an epic for all humanity concerning itself with the vast creation. It has stood the test of time and has proved to be a source of strength and solace for persons in all walks of life.

As a piece of literary composition, it excels all that preceded and followed it. As a story, it has sustained the interest of millions of people ever since its origin and has provided both entertainment and enlightenment to those who approached it. As a scripture for metaphysical appreciation and spiritual practice, it has been placed next to *Gāyatrī*, the mother of all Vedic hymns. As a descriptive code of ethics, it has provided a practical guidance to people facing various problems, confronting several conflicts and trying to find out an acceptable way of life.

Whenever we think of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we are immediately reminded of two other works of similar significance and appeal—namely the *Mahābhārata* and *Śrīmadbhāgavatam*. The main character in these works is *Kṛṣṇa* while *Rāma* is the central figure in *Rāmāyaṇa*. Even though the role of Lord *Kṛṣṇa* in *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavatam* presents greater variety and appeals more to the common man than the role played by *Rāma* in

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Rāmāyaṇa, *Rāmāyaṇa* as an epic and as a treasure of memorable ideas and ideals has become more popular through the ages and has found its way through all parts of the world in some form or other.

The other two works the *Mahābhārata* and *Bhāgavata* have not however become so popular as the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The story is, no doubt, remembered and re-told in several forms, but the original work as such would not become accessible to the common man. To some extent, the *Bhāgavata* could find a place in the daily life of some scholars. The fact is that the *Rāmāyaṇa* appeals mainly to the physical aspect of human life, the day-to-day problems, conflicts and compromises, while the *Mahābhārata* deals with human life at an intellectual level – diplomacy, statesmanship, strategy and similar things connected with governance and administration of a kingdom. The third one, *Bhāgavatam* deals with all that is divine, metaphysical, spiritual and philosophical. It has very little to do with the physical existence of man. Even the physical activities of God in human form are too difficult to comprehend for an average man, that is why generally people mis-understand and mis-interpret the activities of Lord *Kṛṣṇa*, particularly his playful sports. But this problem is not there in *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is a simple story dealing with the mundane problems of human life. It is essentially the story of a man gifted with clear vision, straightforward thinking and genuine interest in purposeful living. Another beauty about the *Rāmāyaṇa* is that while it deals with physical dimension of life, it has not ignored the other two dimensions, namely, intellectual and spiritual, depending upon the

ability of the reader and his capacity to understand, assimilate and appreciate the threefold merit of this world. It presents a true-colour and a true picture of life in its perfect form.

There is lot of research which has gone into this work. It was not by accident that *Vālmīki* chose to write the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The idea of creating something, which provides eternal sustenance to humanity was at the back of his mind for a long time. He was contemplating over this idea for years together and found an opportunity to ventilate his feelings when he found a suitable counter-part in the form of *Nārada*. One fine morning, when he meets *Nārada*, he enquires whether he had come across a perfect man in the world with harmonious development of various faculties that go to make up a full man. The answer was readily available. Luckily, such a person was walking on the face of the earth, when this question was raised by Sage *Vālmīki*. So *Nārada* readily responds to the query and describes briefly the main features of the ideal personality in about 100 verses. This forms the nucleus for the entire composition of *Vālmīki*. It appears as if every word that came out of the mouth of *Nārada* was enlarged to the full size and presented in the form of a comprehensive profile of life by *Vālmīki*.

In this context, it is relevant to recollect the relative description of the two personalities, *Vālmīki* and *Nārada*. We find this description in the very first verse of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

tapah svādhyāyanirataṁ tapasvī vāgvidāṁ varam |
nāradaṁ pariprapaccha vālmīkī munipuṅgavam ||

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In this verse *Vālmiki* is described as *tapasvī*, a person who has done lot of penance. While *Nārada* is described as a person with a background of penance coupled with perseverance. This difference should be carefully noticed. *Vālmiki* who poses the question has mere penance to his credit while *Nārada*, who is capable of answering the question has perseverance, as an additional qualification. It is common sense that penance is a personal trait which becomes fruitful and meaningful to the world only when it is combined with perseverance. There are two more epithets used in this verse to describe *Nārada*. He is said to be the most outstanding exponent of the calculus of speech and at the same time he is described as a skillful observer of silence. This balance between speech and silence is what is required for a person like *Vālmiki*, who has conceived the idea of bringing out an epic for the entire humanity to last until eternity. Thus, the admirable admixture of penance and perseverance, and speech and silence constitutes the background for the composition of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

With this background, *Vālmiki* proceeds to the river *Tamāsā* and feels highly delighted to see the river water flowing with a crystal clear brilliance. His thoughts immediately go to the mind of the ideal person whom he was conceiving as the hero of his epic and he feels that the ideal man perhaps thinks as clearly and fluently as the water flows in the river. Suddenly something sad happens. A couple of birds sitting on a tree get separated by the merciless act of a cruel hunter. This separation rouses a compassion in the pious heart of the Sage which adds a

new dimension to the story. Compassion forms the basis for his composition, while penance, perseverance, speech and silence constitute the four pillars on which is erected the edifice of *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Brahmā, the creator of the universe, rightly predict —
yāvat sthāsyanti girayaḥ saritaśca mahītale |
tāvadrāmāyaṇakathā lokeṣu pracariṣyati ||

The story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* will not only survive but will spread widely to all the corners of the world as long as there is stability in the mountains and flowing water in the rivers.

Sublimation of Soul is the sum and substance of the entire philosophy and literature of the *Rāmāyaṇa* both in the original Sanskrit and in the later versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* in various languages — Indian and foreign. In *Vālmīki*, the theme emerges out of a quest for a pure soul with a purposeful living consciously or unconsciously intended for the uplift of Man who is potentially divine. The dialogue between the two sages *Vālmīki* and *Nārada* concerns itself with this enquiry and concludes with a concrete vision personified in *Rāma* and his beloved companion *Sītā*. In fact, the word *Rāmāyaṇa* includes both *Rāma* and *Sītā* as the word *Rāma* lends itself to the two-fold interpretation in the masculine and feminine forms. It is the march or the advancement of the two illustrious personalities — *Rāma* and *Sītā* — that makes the work *Rāmāyaṇa* immortal and eternal. The Creator, *Brahmā* has rightly proclaimed that this time-honoured work will not merely survive, but even spread itself in all corners of the world as long as mountains have strength to stand and rivers have vigour to flow.

The various versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* in different languages fully substantiate this prediction. There is no language in India which has not cherished and nourished this soul-elevating theme adding, of course, its own colour and complex only to make it more popular and homely for the masses. Whatever be the form it has taken in various vernaculars, the norm underlined by Sage *Vālmīki* in his

protoform of this treatise has been scrupulously followed by all his successors with a few exceptions here and there.

The Hindī language has been singularly fortunate in having inherited this tradition and inculcating it in the masses as an inseparable and instinctive element in their day to day life. This has become possible because of the advent of an admirable personality like *Gosvāmī Tulasī Dāsa* (1526-1623) who combines in himself the unusual heights of a saint, a seer and a scholar, all in one, with the fine sentiments of a poet. The moment we think of *Rāmāyaṇa* literature in Hindi, our mind instantly touches the feet of this great person and recollects with reverberating memory his immortal work '*Rāma Carita Mānasa* or *Tulasī Rāmāyaṇa* as it is popularly known outside the Hindi circle. It is not that *Tulasī* was the only person who wrote *Rāmāyaṇa* in Hindi. There are, in fact, scores of others both preceding and succeeding *Tulasī Dāsa* who tried their genius in handling this theme. But no other poet could reach the masses in so penetrating a way as this Saint of *Sarayū*. For that matter, several other works of *Tulasī* dealing with the same theme of *Rāmāyaṇa* could not match his magnum opus—*Rāma Carita Mānasa*. *Madhusūdan Sarasvatī* rightly recognises this great soul as a mobile plant *Tulasī* purifying the garden of bliss and with the cluster of Juice collected and enjoyed by the Lord Himself.

ānanda kānane kaścīt jaṅgamastulasī taruḥ |
kaviitā mañjarī yasya rāmabhramara bhūṣitā ||

The writing of *Rāma Carita Mānasa* which *Tulasī* is said to have started on the birth day of *Rāma* in 1574 A.D.

marks a memorable event not only in the history of the Hindi language and literature, but even in the entire history of devotional literature in India and abroad. It has entered into the nerves of the people. This remarkable phenomenon can be easily explained and appreciated when we evaluate this work in comparison with the other works on similar theme in the Hindi language.

Prithvī Rāja Rāso of *Canda Baradāi* is considered to be the first literary composition in Hindi. This work incidentally presents an account of the ten *avatāras* of *Bhagavān* including the incarnation of *Rāma*. There are about 100 verses covering the description of *Rāma* particularly his battle with *Rāvaṇa*. This is the earliest reference to the story of *Rāma* in Hindi literature and dates back to the last quarter of the twelfth century. Later *Sūradāsa*, the most popular poet of the *Kṛṣṇa* Cult, also sang the glory of *Rāma* in about 150 songs. Immediately preceding *Tulasī Dāsa* was a noted poet called *Isvara Dāsa* who wrote *Rāma Janma* (the birth of *Rāma*) and *Aṅgada Paija* (the stand of *Aṅgada*) both in *Avadhī* dialect and in the *Dohā-Caupāyī* style later adopted by *Tulasī*. These are some of the works which provided a background for *Tulasī* though the main source of inspiration for him was from within.

The most prominent among the contemporaries of *Tulasī Dāsa* was *Keśava Dāsa* whose *Rāma Candrikā* is known for its versatility and high pedantry. Though endowed with poetic excellence of high order, *Keśava Dāsa* is said to have composed this work in a spirit of

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competition rather than devotion. Looking at the overwhelming popularity of *Rāma Carita Mānasa* throughout the Hindi speaking area, *keśava Dāsa* made up his mind to outshine him and is believed to have completed this work in a record time of one day sitting throughout the night with a strong determination. But the work proved to be a hard nut even for scholars and more so for the common man as it had hardly any appeal to the heart. It has been condemned even by the intellectuals who provide the sole readership for this work as a 'Phantom of poetic fancy and a strenuous exercise in futility'. Frequent change of metres, in which the poet takes fancy without any regard for their contextual propriety, makes the work a museum of metres rather than a source of delight.

The whole work is divided into 39 *prakāśas* or chapters out of which only two chapters are devoted for the story of *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* which, in *Tulasī*, forms the most inspiring and moving section of the story. *Keśava Dāsa* fails to delve deep in describing the various incidents revolving round the exile of *Rāma*. *Rāma Candrikā* of *Keśava Dāsa* starts abruptly with the entrance of *Viśvāmitra* into the court of *Daśaratha*. The elaborate description of *Ayodhyā* by *Viśvāmitra* presents a rather poor picture of this saintly character. Insertion of all types of descriptions wherever space permits gives the colour of a poetic gymnasium to the work. *Kaikeyī* is the worst hit character in *Rāma Candrikā*. The moment she comes to know about the coronation of *Rāma*, she instantly demands the two boons granted to her earlier. Lack of identification with the

emotional background of major characters is the main drawback in this work.

But inspite of all these shortcomings, *Rāma Candrikā*, of *Keśava Dāsa* is still alive and is read atleast by scholars and students of Hindi literature mainly for its rhetoric and poetic acrobatics. *Keśava Dāsa* was a court poet temperamentally tuned to please his patron by playing to his passionate fancies. *Rāma* was also a patron for him and therefore he tries to decorate the theme with a variety of metres, series of metaphors, galaxy of dialogues, bundle of descriptions and pedantic play of words. *Keśava Dāsa* and his *Rāma Candrikā* are today remembered for this exhibition of exuberent poetic genius and not for devotional or emotional ecstasy. One has to turn to *Tulasī* for the latter aspect.

There are however a few places in *Keśava Dāsa* where we get a glimpse of his sensitivity to human emotions. When *Viśvāmitra* takes leave of *Daśaratha* with his two sons, *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa*, the feelings of *Daśaratha* are described by the poet in a few, but fitting words. *Daśaratha* touches the feet of Sage *Viśvāmitra* in reverence and immediately returns to his chamber with his eyes full of tears. He does not speak a single word but his silent gestures full of emotion speak volumes about his intense feelings which no words can express. Such instances are however very few in this work.

The most remarkable achievement of *Keśava Dāsa* lies in his dramatic dialogues. The dialogue between *Āṅgada* and *Rāvaṇa* is supposed to be one of the finest pieces of

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Hindi literature. The picturesque description of the marriage procession in *Mithilā* is also a fine specimen of poetic expression but with an overplay of pomp and pleasure. The element of devotion, divinity and dignity that the theme demands is not much in evidence. But one thing can be said with confidence that *Rāma Candrikā* of *Keśava Dāsa* has decidedly helped in highlighting the work or *Tulasī Dāsa* even if it has not been able to shine by itself. In this respect, the title *Rāma Candrikā* given by the poet appears to be apt and meaningful. This is an indirect contribution of *Keśava Dāsa* to the *Rāmāyaṇa* literature in Hindi in general.

There were two more writers – *Agradāsa* and *Nābhādāsa* – who were also contemporaries of *Tulasī Dāsa*. The latter was a disciple of the former. Both of them wrote different works on *Rāma* with a common title, *Aṣṭayāma*, which presents the daily routine of *Rāma* and *Sītā* with particular reference to their pleasures and pastimes. These two works are largely influenced by the *Kṛṣṇa* literature prevalent at that time. *Ādi Rāmāyaṇa* of *Sodhī Meharbāna* written in Punjabi mixed Hindi also belongs to this period. *Avadha Vilāsa*, of *Lāla Dāsa*, *Sītā Rāma Caupāyī* of *Samaya Sundara* and *Avatāra Carita* of *Narahari Dāsa* are some of the important works of this period dealing with the theme of *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Rāma Carita Mānasa of *Gosvāmī Tulasī Dāsa* excels all the works that precede it. It has been enshrined in the hearts of people providing the most delicious nourishment to their head and heart. There is hardly any literate person

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in the north, particularly in the Hindi speaking region, who does not remember atleast one or two lines from this work. Even the illiterate people engaged in humble occupations in life are often found quoting line after line from *Rāma Carita Mānasa* in their usual conversation. The popular sayings like *daiva daiva ālasī pukārā* (The idle ones cry for God) *sabahiṃ nacāvata rāma gosāiṃ* (All are toys in the hands of God), *jaga bhala bhalahiṃ poca kaha pocū* (The world is good for the good and bad for the evil), *binu sataśaṅga viveka na hoī* (Wisdom cannot dawn without good company) are all from *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. It can be said with confidence that *Mānasa* has been guiding the *Mānasa* (the thinking) of its readers for the past four hundred years.

What is the secret behind this unprecedented and unparalleled popularity? The answer is simple. It is the simplicity and the implicit sense of dedication and devotion breathing throughout the work that made it so popular and splendid. There is absolutely no element of ambition or ego in the author or even the feeling that a master piece is taking shape in his hands. On the other hand he makes it clear that he is no scholar and his mental calibre is very much limited. But with all humility he says that he has a strong desire to offer his humble heart at the altar of his deity and it is only His Grace that can enable him to fulfil this great task. To quote the words of the poet himself,

kabita bibeka eka nahin more

satya kahauṃ likhi kāgada kore |

jadapi kabita-rasa-ekas-māhīṃ

rāma pratāpa pragaṭa ehi mahīṃ ||

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(I have no poetic genius whatsoever to my credit. I say this not in humility; but it is a fact which I can record in black and white. The only merit in this work is the grace of *Rāma*). In the lengthy preamble which covers more than half the lines in *Bāla Kāṇḍa*, he invokes the blessings of all Gods and Goddesses, saints and sages, poets of the past, the present and the future, ladies and gentlemen, the gentle and the cruel, the good and the bad and all the citizens of *Ayodhyā* who were blessed by the Lord. This all-embracing invocation reveals the heartfelt humility of the Saint. But, in fact, he gives a remarkable account of his profound genius wherever the occasion demands in the vast canvas of his work. When we look at the wide range of topics covered by *Tulasī* in his *Mānasa* incidental to the main story, we find it a compendium of poetry, philosophy, ethics, sociology and jurisprudence. The captivating story of *Rāma* provides only the basis for *Tulasī* to present a practical guide to the perplexed mind and a code of conduct for the common man clarifying all his doubts. For this, *Tulasī* draws material from innumerable sources. He mentions only a few of them in his introductory verse-

*nānāpurāṇa-nigamāgama-sammataṁ yad
rāmāyaṇe nigaditaṁ kvacidanyato'pi |*

The entire Vedic and Puranic literature accessible to him and the *Rāmāyaṇa* of *Vālmiki* and its later versions, mainly the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* provide the source material for *Tulasī*.

It is surprising to find references to *Pāṇini* in some places. The line *sarisa svāna maghavāna jubānū* equating

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the dog, the god *Indra* and the youth reminds us of the aphorism *śvayuva maghonāmataaddhite* in *Pāṇini*. Similarly the usage of the word *svaḥ sambhava* for air testifies the vast knowledge of *Tulasī* in the field of *Nyāya* and *Mīmāṃsā*. But the most remarkable feature is that *Tulasī* maintains the utmost simplicity in his style throughout the work unless the context requires otherwise. *Mānasa* is thus a treasure house of all the knowledge that a seeker of truth can look for. In this sense, it can be maintained without any exaggeration that what is needed for the *Mānasa* of the human mind is contained in *Mānasa* of *Tulasī* or, conversely, what is not contained in the *Mānasa* is not to be found in the human mind *yanna mānase tanna mānase*.

The word *Mānasa* indicates not merely the human mind, but also the crystal-clear celestial lake located on the snowy peaks of the *Himālaya*. Describing his concept of *Mānasa* in metaphorical imagery, *Tulasī* tells us that the holy mind of the pure is the land on which this *Mānasa* flows with relishing and refreshing water which is nothing but the glory of *Rāma*. The saints are the clouds who pour this water, collecting it from the surrounding oceans of *Vedas* and *Purāṇas*. This water is pure like the noble qualities of *Rāma* who has taken a human form to dispel all impurities in the world. Love and devotion provide taste for this water and keep it cool all the time. This water irrigates the crops of the blessed souls and nourishes unqualified devotion to *Rāma*. This pure water flows into the inner conscience of people through their ears. This lake is surrounded by the four elevated shores which form the forum for free discussion and refreshing discourses by

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qualified Masters and sincere devotees like *Pārvaṭī* and *Parameśvara*, *Yājña-vaḥkya* and *Bharadvāja*, *Bhuṣuṇḍī* (the crow) and *Garuḍa* (the eagle) and finally *Tulasī Dāsa* and his audience. The various metaphors employed in this work represent the waves. The various metres, phrases and expressions stand for the colourful flowers and sweet honey contained in them. Thus goes on this long metaphor with a beautiful description of this 'Lake of Letters'. Such long drawn metaphors are very common in *Tulasī* who is aptly described by scholars as the 'Emperor of Metaphors'. This particular metaphor is the most popular one and is often referred to as the '*Mānasa*-metaphor'.

Tulasī also offers an explanation for naming his work as *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. He says that Lord *Śiva* composed this and kept it in his mind (*mānasa*) for a long time. Later on he delivered it to his beloved wife *Pārvaṭī* at the appropriate time. Hence the name *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. We find a similar affiliation of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa* to Lord *Śiva* who is supposed to be the author of this work. *Tulasī*, the embodiment of humility, attributes the authorship of this work to Lord *Śiva* Himself, whom he considers as his *Guru*. In the initial invocation, he pays homage to Lord *Śiva* in three different ways – firstly as the associate of *Bhavanī*; secondly, as his eternal Master and finally, as the abode of compassion. Again, while concluding the work, he reminds his readers of *Śrī Śambhu*, the author of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. It is therefore of great importance to note that *Tulasī* derives more inspiration from *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*, supposed to have been composed by Lord *Śiva* than the *Rāmāyaṇa* of *Vālmiki*. Moreover *Tulasī* tries to

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 build the edifice of *Rāma Bhakti* on the firm foundation of *Śiva Bhakti*. *Rāma* and *Śiva* are interlinked for him and he condemns all one-sided devotion as meaningless and unpleasant to both.

It should be remembered that *Tulasī* wrote his *Rāma Carita Mānasa* at a time when people indulged in petty quarrels springing from sectarian feelings in religion and devotion. Society stood at cross roads not knowing the right way to follow. National solidarity, moral stability and social harmony were at stake. People lost all faith in divinity. Eventhough *Tulasī* says in his usual unassuming tone that he has composed his *Mānasa* for his own pleasure (*svāntaḥ-sukhāya*), his spectroscopic work provides a solution to almost all the problems that were facing his society. *Rāma Carita Mānasa* thus served as an instrument of harmony in various fields – religious, social, political, linguistic and literary. There is a marvellous combination of almost all the trends and faiths and styles and systems that existed in language, religion and society of his time.

The linguistic harmony brought about by *Tulasī* is the most remarkable achievement in the history of Indian literature. Himself being a profound scholar of Sanskrit language, *Tulasī* chose to use the idiom of the common man in his work *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. It is the spoken idiom of the lowliest in the land that is employed in the *Mānasa* with amazing musical cadence and grandeur. He does not use a single word which cannot be pronounced with ease. even plays in the Shastri Collection.
 even plays in the Shastri Collection.
 hesitate even to alter the spellings of proper nouns to make

them palatable to the unsophisticated tongues of illiterate masses. His aim is to make his language accessible to all like the waters of the sacred *Gaṅgā*. He proclaims that fame, wealth and speech do not serve any purpose if they do not benefit the masses.

kīrati bhanati bhūti bhali sōi |
surasari sama saba kahañ hita hōi ||

It is significant to note that *Tulasī* starts every canto with a few Sanskrit *ślokas* followed by Hindi metres. Again, in concluding the entire work, he uses Sanskrit. This only shows his utmost regard to the Sanskrit language which is balanced by his liberal outlook to accommodate even the ordinary reader who may be ignorant of the Sanskrit language.

The metres employed by *Tulasī* are only a few selected ones. Choosing the most popular metres namely—*Caupāyī*, *Dohā* and *Sorathā* with the occasional appearance of *Chanda* to describe excitement and ecstasy, *Tulasī* handles them with such confidence and felicity that they lend themselves to musical rendition. *Vālmiki's* ideal of making his work suitable for reading as well as singing (*pāṭhye geye ca madhuraṁ*) is realised by *Tulasī* to an optimum degree. His *Caupāyīs* can be sung in almost all the popular tunes and there are, in fact, various versions of singing *Rāma Carita Mānasa* today — all tried by the top musicians of the North. The conversational tone and the dramatic nature of events in the *Mānasa* has provided a pleasant material for the popular folk drama known as *Rāmālīlā*.

Daśaratha who is potentially the absolute *Brahman*. But the method adopted by *Śiva* to convince her of this truth is very peculiar. He tells her to go and see *Rāma* who was at that time moving in the forests searching for his beloved *Sītā*. *Satī* takes it to her head to test the divinity and self-awareness of *Rāma* and appears before him in the disguise of *Sītā*. *Rāma* does not take much time to recognise her, and enquires with a smile as to why she is moving about in the forests all alone leaving her husband *Śiva* elsewhere. This surprises *Satī* and she retreats. On her way back, she finds to her great surprise *Rāma*, *Lakṣmaṇa* and *Sītā* in innumerable forms. She gets puzzled and goes back to *Śiva*. Out of fear, she does not report the whole thing to *Śiva* who, however, visualises everything with his inner powers. As *Satī* takes the form of *Sītā*, if only fancifully, *Śiva* decides not to negotiate with her any longer in terms of his consort. *Satī* prays for redemption and ends her physical body in *Dakṣa Yajña*. Later she becomes *Pārvaṭī* and regains the hand of *Śiva* after long penance. This is the penalty she pays for doubting the intrinsic divinity of *Rāma*. This episode is *Tulasī*'s own creation and finds an elaborate description in the first chapter, *Bāla Kāṇḍa*. This is perhaps a deliberate attempt of *Tulasī* because his main intention was to instil in the minds of his readers a firm faith that *Rāma*, the prince of *Ayodhyā*, is not different from the formless *Brahman* and the same absolute *Brahman* has taken the form of *Rāma* out of love and compassion for his devotees. Then *Tulasī* narrates various episodes of the curse of *Jaya-Vijaya*, the boon granted to *Śatarūpā* and *Manu*, the miserable failure of

Nārada Digitized by eGangotri
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 resulting in the Lord's incarnation and several other instances — leading to the transformation of the absolute *Brahman* into *Bhagavān Rāma*. The name, the form, the land and the actions of *Rāma* are only the manifestations of the potential divinity in him and they are all meaningful to us only when our minds are completely free from sceptic inhibitions. Thus a total annihilation of all suspicions and speculations about the intrinsic divinity of *Bhagavān Rāma* provides the basis for the correct appraisal of the story of *Rāma* or *Rāma Carita* and the philosophy of the '*Mānasa*' behind it. It is only when this perspective is properly assimilated that *Mānasa* becomes meaningful and appeals to our mind.

Tulasī gives us this orientation in a very intensive way in the first phase or *Sopāna* of his work *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. That is why the *Bāla Kāṇḍa* becomes very bulky covering about 360 *dohās* out of a total of 1074 *dohās* in the entire *Mānasa*. Readers are kept on waiting to see the birth of *Rāma* which is preceded by several discourses, discussions, dialogues and incidents described above. But once *Rāma* is born, the story acquires a certain dynamism and incidents follow in quick succession. When *Tulasī* describes *Rāma* as a boy playing with his brothers and delighting his parents, one can easily see the impact of *Sūradāsa* on him. We almost feel as if we are reading *Sūradāsa* again. As in *Bhāgavatam*, *Mānasa* also presents the child *Rāma* in the form of four-armed *Bhagavān Viṣṇu* and *Kausalyā* feels blessed that her wish to find *Bhagavān* as her son has been fulfilled. Later also, one day she finds

to her great surprise that he is playing in the cradle and taking food in the prayer-chamber almost simultaneously. Then *Bhagavān* reveals His universal form, the *Viśvarūpa* and requests her mother not to disclose it to anybody. This is a singular favour done to *Kausalyā*. *Ayodhyā* too is not less fortunate. Overwhelmed with joy, even Sun-god stops at *Ayodhyā* for a month making it just a day for the inhabitants of *Ayodhyā*. Nobody knew this except perhaps *Rāma*.

There are a few deviations from *Vālmīki* in *Mānasa*. The major deviation in *Bāla Kāṇḍa* is the meeting of *Rāma* and *Sītā* in a garden in the outskirts of *Mithilā* a day before their marriage. This episode often known as *Vāṭikā Prasāṅga* is found in *Prasanna Rāghavam*, a Sanskrit play and also in *Kamba Rāmāyaṇam* of Tamil. In *Tulasī*, the bow incident is immediately followed by the sudden entrance of *Paraśurāma* who challenges the valour of *Rāma*, but finally surrenders himself to his supreme power. This incident takes place after marriage in *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa*. In *Tulasī*, *Lakṣmaṇa* becomes more eloquent than *Rāma* in condemning *Paraśurāma*. *Daśaratha* does not figure there. In *Tulasī*, *Viśvāmitra* accompanies *Rāma* upto *Ayodhyā* whereas in *Vālmīki* he leaves for his hill station in the north the day following the marriage.

Kaikeyī plays a pivotal role in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Several people attribute several reasons for the sudden change of her mind. *Tulasī* brings in *Sarasvatī*, the Goddess of Speech, who at the request of gods changes the mind of *Mantharā* and *Kaikeyī* falls a prey to her mischief. Thus

Kaikeyī becomes only an instrument in the divine plan. The character of *Bharata* has received a masterly treatment in the hands of *Tulasī*. Epitomizing his entire personality *Tulasī* describes him as Devotion to *Rāma* Personified. The whole world chants the name of *Rāma* and for *Rāma*, the name of *Bharata* is enchanting. *Rāma* finds, in *Bharata*, the potentiality to arrest the dynamic world in a moment and also to set the static world in motion if only he wills to do so. But even such a powerful prince becomes a silent servant of *Rāma*. Their union in *Citrakūṭa* is the most moving scene in the entire *Mānasa*. It is a meeting of two magnanimous minds whose language transcends all limits of human comprehension. The presence of *Janaka* at this crucial time is an added innovation of *Tulasī*. The meeting in *Citrakūṭa* provides a forum more for exchange of hearts than of minds in the language of *Tulasī*. *Rāma* and *Bharata*, both, leave the decision in the hands of the other and how the final decision is taken is mysterious. *Citrakūṭa*, as the name indicates, presents a peculiar play of emotions, interaction of hearts and elevation of soul. *Tulasī* is seen at his best in this part of the story. If *Vālmiki* excelled in *Sundara Kāṇḍa* about which it is said that there is nothing that is not beautiful in *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, (*sundare kim na sundaram*) it can be said about *Citrakūṭa* episode in *Tulasī* that there is nothing that is not unique in this union — *citrākhye kim na citritam* .

The real *līlā* of *Maryādā Puruṣottama*, *Rāma*, starts from the moment he enters the forests. Men and women living in the remote forests feel blessed when they see the two princes *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* accompanied by *Sītā*

walking bare-foot in the forests, enjoying the nature, granting redemption to the waiting souls and showering grace on all humble devotees like *Guha*, *Sutīkṣṇa* and *Śabarī*. This march of *Rāma* finds a glorious expression in *Mānasa* the like of which it is difficult to find in any other *Rāmāyaṇa* in Hindi. *Tulasī* does not waste words in describing the battles fought by *Rāma* against the demons but concentrates on the glorification of his grace. He misses no opportunity to pay homage to his grandeur and glory. Consequently we find a number of hymns or *Stotras* in praise of *Rāma* covering a major part of *Aranya Kāṇḍa* — as in the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*. On one occasion *Tulasī* presents a sage paying homage to *Rāma* almost forgetting himself out of sheer devotion and ecstasy. As this sage appears in the vicinity of *Tulasī*'s native place, scholars have speculated if he were not *Tulasī* himself.

One major deviation in *Tulasī* is the creation of *Māyā Sītā*. Immediately after defeating *Khara* and *Dūṣaṇa* in the fierce battle against thousands of demons, *Rāma* considers it safe to leave *Sītā* in a secured place so that he could fight against the demons without any anxiety. Accordingly he entrusts her to the God of Fire and creates a *Māyā Sītā* for the time being. It is only this *Māyā Sītā* that is carried away by *Rāvaṇa*. After the death of *Rāvaṇa*, this *Māyā Sītā* is exchanged for the real one. Nobody knows this secret — not even *Lakṣmaṇa*. This episode helps *Tulasī* in depicting the further events as playful manifestations of the Lord. His grief over the separation of his wife is only a pretension and this accounts for his leisurely discourse with *Nārada* who joins the Lord in *Ṛṣyamūka* not to share

his grief, but to derive knowledge and wisdom from him. Not only this, but even the friendship with *Sugrīva*, the trying battle with *Rāvaṇa* and his forces and his final victory over evil and return to *Ayodhyā* are all playful diversions for him and elevating to us. His main objective is to establish faith and devotion in the minds of the blessed souls that approach him as a result of their virtuous deeds in the past. That is why the first thing he does after crossing the ocean is to install the idol of *Śiva*. This holy place is known even today as *Rāmeśvaram*, where *Rāma* and *Śiva* are worshipped with equal devotion.

It is surprising to note that *Sundara Kāṇḍa* does not receive so much attention in *Tulasī* as in *Vālmīki*. Some critics have given an interesting reason for this. According to them, *Hanumān* wrote the *Rāmāyaṇa* and showed it to *Vālmīki* who pointed out the subjective element in it. *Hanumān* then is said to have thrown it in the sea and *Tulasī* supposed to be an incarnation of *Hanumān* is believed to have revived it in the form of *Rāma Carita Mānasa* after a long time and therefore avoided all extra-emphasis on his own achievements. Whatever be the reason, it is a fact that *Tulasī* excelled more in *Ayodhyā* than in *Sundara Kāṇḍa*.

In *Yuddha Kāṇḍa* or *Laṅkā Kāṇḍa* as *Tulasī* calls it, there is no major deviation from *Vālmīki* except the introduction of *Kālanemi* episode based on *Ananda Rāmāyaṇa*. Another deviation is *Hanumān*'s landing in *Ayodhyā* on his way back to *Laṅkā* carrying *Sanjīvanī* with him. Finding *Hanumān* flying over *Ayodhyā*, *Bharata*

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 mistakes him for a demon and shoots him down with an arrow. Realising his mistake in no time, he sends *Hanumān* to *Laṅkā* with the same arrow which brought him down.

In describing the battles fought by *Rāma*, *Tulasī* excels even the war poets of eleventh century. In all these thrilling and captivating descriptions, he takes care to present *Rāma* as a playful master of the mysterious course of events. When he accepts the divine chariot sent by Indra or takes a clue from *Vibhīṣaṇa* for killing *Rāvaṇa*, he is only granting them a privilege which they deserve. When *Vibhīṣaṇa* feels sorry that *Rāma* is fighting barefoot without any vehicle, *Bhagavān* tells him that his chariot has valour and courage as the wheels; truth and virtue as the flag and the staff; determination, discrimination, discipline and dedication as the horses and magnanimity, mercy and equity as the reins and his chariot is driven by devotion and armed by detachment and contentment and is therefore ensured of victory not only over the external enemies like *Rāvaṇa* but also over the inner enemies of *Mānasa*. This is the battle described by *Tulasī* in his *Laṅkā Kāṇḍa*.

Another interesting thing in *Laṅkā Kāṇḍa* is *Trijaṭā's* explanation as to why *Rāma* is not able to kill *Rāvaṇa* for such a long time. While *Sītā* is spending anxious moments and eagerly awaiting the thrilling victory of *Rāma*, *Trijaṭā* tells her that *Rāma* is capable of ending the life of *Rāvaṇa* in a moment, but he is hesitating to shoot an arrow at his heart (which is the only vulnerable place in *Rāvaṇa's* body) only because *Sītā* is enshrined in his heart and in the heart of *Sītā* lies *Rāma* himself. *Rāma* is therefore waiting to find

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 a moment when the thought of *Sītā* deserts the heart of *Rāvaṇa*. The moment *Sītā* departs from his heart, *Rāma* would be able to kill him. This explanation not only brings out the magnanimity of *Rāma*, but also the nobility of *Rāvaṇa* who even for a moment cannot forget *Sītā*. Blessed is *Rāvaṇa* in his own way who got salvation at the hands of *Rāma*. Incidentally, this incident depicts *Rāma*'s boundless mercy — one who is reluctant and hesitates to kill even his avowed enemy. It is worth noting that *Rāma* is never depicted by *Tulasī* as harsh or cruel.

That is why we do not find any mention of *Sītā*'s exile to forests in *Tulasī*'s *Uttara Kāṇḍa*. All that is mentioned about the family life of *Rāma* is that *Sītā* gives birth to two sons — *Lava-Kuśa*. This is followed by a series of philosophical discourses.

In fact, the *Uttara Kāṇḍa* in *Tulasī* is altogether a new version — entirely different from *Vālmīki*. The coronation ceremony of *Rāma* and *Bharata*, the establishment of *Rāma-Rājya* in *Ayodhyā* and the parting scene of all monkey chiefs and *Vibhīṣaṇa* taking leave of *Rāma* with great reluctance are all poignant episodes in *Mānasa*. *Aṅgada* trying to stay back in *Ayodhyā* and *Rāma* trying to convince him presents a touching scene. The story should end here. But it does not because what *Tulasī* intends to convey is not the story but the glory behind the story. The real *Mānasa* starts only after the story ends.

The remaining and the major portion of *Uttara Kāṇḍa* contains teachings of *Rāma* and his message to the devotees

including his brothers and residents of *Ayodhyā*. This is popularly known as *Rāma Gītā*. This is followed by the lengthy dialogue between *Kāka Bhuṣuṇḍī* (The learned Crow) and *Garuḍa* (the eagle—vehicle of the Lord). This dialogue throws light on various aspects of devotion, different forms of *Rāma* in different ages, the essence of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the correct approach to worship. The blessed crow, *Bhuṣuṇḍī*, serves as an eye-opener not only to *Garuḍa* who has the rare privilege of serving the Lord as His vehicle, but also to sages like *Yājñavalkya* and for that matter Lord *Śiva* Himself. The *Rāma Carita Mānasa* of *Tulasī* concludes with the counselling voice of the crow, *Bhuṣuṇḍī*. *Mānasa* has the mysterious power of converting a crow into a cuckoo. Unqualified devotion to the Lord is the key note of *Rāma Carita Mānasa*.

In fact the sole intention of *Tulasī* in writing *Rāma Carita Mānasa* is to inculcate a high sense of devotion and dedication to the cause of divinity personified in *Bhagavān Rāma* and every incident he describes is directed towards this end. The seven parts of the story form the seven stages (or *sopānas* as *Tulasī* calls them) leading to the attainment of the highest bliss through undivided attention to the absolute *Brahman* who has taken the form of *Rāma*. All the characters in the *Mānasa* are moulded in such a way that every one of them worships *Rāma* in his or her own way. *Daśaratha* and *Kausalyā* approach him with affection; *Lakṣmaṇa*, *Bharata* and *Śatrughna* respect him as an elder brother. *Guha*, *Hanumān* and *Śabarī* serve him like faithful servants. *Sugrīva* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* congratulate themselves for having secured a friend like him. Even *Rāvaṇa* knows in his

heart of hearts that *Rāma* is not an ordinary man. But his fate does not allow him to accept his divinity in an open way. The balanced and benevolent personality of *Rāma* influences almost all the characters in *Mānasa*. Even nature appears to be singing the glory of *Rāma*. His enchanting beauty, his elevating character and his invincible valour find an echo in every syllable that comes out of the *Mānasa* of *Tulasī*. *Sūa* excels even *Rāma* in beauty, nobility and piety. There is a sense of self-restraint in almost all the characters connected with this ideal couple. *Kausalyā*, for instance, suppresses her motherly affection and consents to *Rāma*'s proceeding to the forests if it is so desired by both *Daśaratha* and *Kaikeyī*. This magnanimity comes out of consideration for others even at the cost of one's own interests. This is the key note in *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. The unconditional surrender at the feet of the Almighty is the highest state of attainment advocated by *Tulasī* through the medium of the Divine Crow – *Bhuṣuṇḍī*. This is preceded by various other stages like determination, detachment, dedication, devotion, dexterity, dissemination of divine attitudes and finally complete identification with one's own self. These are the seven stages or *sopānas* presented by *Tulasī* in the seven *Kāṇḍas* of his *Rāmāyaṇa*.

Rāma Carita Mānasa is not the only work of *Tulasī* dealing with the story of *Rāma*. His *Kavitāvalī*, *Gītāvalī*, *Rāmajñā Praśna* and *Jānakī Maṅgala* are all in praise of *Rāma*. *Tulasī* does not feel satisfied with a casual reference to *Rāma*. It is a part of his life. He sang and sang in praise of his Master to his heart's content in several works and in the *Rāma Carita Mānasa* he reached the highest peak of

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devotion. A careful analysis and a comparative estimate of his earlier works mentioned above will reveal that in the initial stages *Tulasī* followed *Vālmiki* very closely but later on gradually tried to evolve his own concept of *Rāma* suited to his inner conscience and the needs of his society. In *Rāma Carita Mānasa*, we find a peculiar version of the famous *Navadhā Bhakti* mentioned in *Bhāgavat*. Good company, interest in spiritual discourses, obedience to *Guru*, singing the glory of the Lord, meditation, self control, visualising God in all, contentment and complete surrender to the Lord are the nine stages of devotion advocated by *Tulasī*. These stages are preached by *Rāma* to *Śabarī*. But it should be remembered that the nine stages of devotion mentioned in *Bhāgavatam* are closely followed when *Rāma* preaches devotion to *Lakṣmaṇa* on an earlier occasion. This only shows that *Tulasī* evolved his own theory of devotion to suit the requirement of devotees like *Śabarī* while he advocates the traditional path of devotion for persons like *Lakṣmaṇa*.

The writing of *Rāmāyaṇas* continued even after *Tulasī*. For about a century or two after *Tulasī*, a number of poets took to translation of outstanding Sanskrit works dealing with the story of *Rāma*. '*Bhāṣā Yoga Vāsiṣṭha*' of Rama Prasada Niranjanī, *Padmapurāṇa* of Daulata Rama and *Rāma Carita* (based on *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*) of Sadal Mishra are some of the prominent works of this type.

The present century too had much to contribute to this branch of literature. The most outstanding work is *Sāketa* by Maithili Saran Gupta written in the late twenties

of this century. Shri Gupta based his work on *Tulasī* but drew inspiration from Rabindra Nath Tagore who focussed the attention of several scholars and poets of his time to the much neglected character of *Urmitā*. It is a pity, says Tagore, that the poor lady *Urmitā* could not receive even a few drops of water from *Vālmiki's* sacred water pot or *Kamaṇḍala*. Maithili Saran took inspiration from this and narrated the story of *Rāma* with emphasis on *Urmitā* and *Kaikeyī* making *Ayodhyā* or *Sāketa* as the centre. The pangs of separation experienced by *Urmitā* in isolation form the central theme of the work. The whole story revolves round *Sāketa*. *Kaikeyī's* repentance is another innovation. She attempts to persuade *Rāma* to forget and forgive her and come back to *Ayodhyā*. But *Rāma* would not certainly go back, as is expected of him. However *Kaikeyī* feels relieved of her cruel behaviour to a large extent. *Bharata* and other members of the royal family come to know of all that happened afterwards through *Hanumān* whom *Bharata* happens to see flying over *Sāketa* carrying *Sanjīvanī* to rescue the life of *Lakṣmaṇa* and shoots him down with an arrow mistaking him for a demon. This incident is taken from *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. The language and style employed in *Sāketa* is very homely and pleasant. According to Maithili Saran Gupta, anybody can rise to the level of a poet if he chooses to write on *Rāma* because the story of *Rāma* is, in itself, poetic in very sense of the term.

Among other works produced recently on the story of *Rāma* are '*Vaidehī Vanavāsa*' of Ayodhya Singh Upadhyay, '*Sāketa Santa*' of Baldev Prasad Mishra, '*Urmitā*' of Balakrishna Sharma Navin and *Kaikeyī* of Kedar Nath

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Mishra. The common tendency in these works is to bring to light new aspects of the *Rāmāyaṇa* which, for some reason or other, were ignored by the predecessors and also try to explain the supernatural element in the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the light of modern ethics. There is also a positive desire to search for some guidelines in this time-honoured work which could be of relevance to the present conditions of living.

One modern version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* written by Radheshyam Kathavachak in simple *Khaḍī Bolī* is also popular particularly in the rural society. The language is so simple that it is used in the folk play of *Rāmālīlā* in villages. An abridged version of *Vālmīki* in simple Hindi by Swami Satyanand is also popular in some section of society. But no *Rāmāyaṇa* has been able to replace the *Rāma Carita Mānasa* for regular *Parāyaṇa* or *Akhaṇḍa Pāṭha*. The facility is that it can be completed in 24 hours and it is generally read from morning to morning.

A chronological study of *Rāmāyaṇa* literature in Hindi or for that matter in any Indian language will focus our attention on three aspects of *Rāmāyaṇa* — *Bhakti* (Devotion), *Śakti* (Power) and *Rakti* (Entertainment). *Vālmīki* maintained a masterly balance between all the three forces while the later versions emphasised one or more of them making the rest subservient. In *Tulasī*, one finds at first sight the element of *Bhakti* or devotion coming to the forefront. But a deeper study and a closer analysis of the work reveals the enormous power of spiritual vibrations breathing through the inspired composition of the gifted

poet. *Tulasī* hints at this with all humility at his command that the lines of *Rāma Carita Mānasa* are blessed with the blissful presence of *Rāma*. He says,

ehi mahañ raghupati nāma udārā
ati pāvana purāṇa śruti sārā /

(This work contains the noble name of *Rāma* which is capable of purifying the mind like the *Purāṇas* and the *Vedas* whose essence can be found here).

This humble statement of *Tulasī* requires careful study and understanding. There are about ten thousand lines in *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. A close observation of these lines reveals that there is a spontaneous repetition of the letters *Ra* and *Ma* in almost all the lines making them verbal manifestations of the Lord *Rāma*. One can also find a frequent occurrence of the syllable *Sa* in almost all the lines indicating the supplementary representation of Mother *Sītā*. In fact *Tulasī* feels the presence of *Sītā* and *Rāma* in every inch of the universe. Accordingly while paying homage to all that is present in the world he says,

siya rāma maya saba jānī
karaun praṇāma jori juga pānī /

(I find *Sītā* and *Rāma* in every part of the world. I therefore pay homage to all with folded hands).

This concept of universal presence of the Lord manifests itself in every line of *Rāma Carita Mānasa*. If *Vālmiki* charged his voice with the enchanting sounds of *Gāyatrī*, the mother of *Vedas*, *Tulasī* made his *Mānasa* saturated with the soul-elevating presence of *Tāraka Rāma*

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 thus providing an easy clue to the 'Sublimation of Soul'
 to his readers.

The unqualified devotion to the Supreme Power of the Lord, the enchanting words in which this devotion finds expression and the unique popularity of this work among the masses for the last four hundred years are enough to convince us that *Vālmīki* himself has come again in the form of *Tulasī* to impart the message of the Lord in the language of the masses as supported by the popular saying, *Vālmīki Tulasī Bhayo* /

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 Bhagavān Śrī Satya Sai Bābā (May 1977).

RAMĀYAṆA IN SOUTH INDIAN LANGUAGES

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in the South is atleast a thousand years old. The earliest version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* available in any South Indian language, or for that matter in any modern Indian language, is *Rāmāvatāram* (popularly known as *Kambarāmāyaṇam*) believed to have been written by the great Tamil poet *Kamban* in the ninth century AD though some scholars would like to put it in the twelfth century. Even then this epic enjoys the first place among various versions of *Rāmāyaṇa* available in complete and comprehensive form in any modern Indian language based on the tradition laid down by *Vālmīki*.

There were, however, a number of works relating to the story of *Rāma* in Pre-*Kamban* period, not only in Tamil, but also in Kannada. But most of these works were based on Jainism and other sources of the theme. There is hardly any similarity between these versions and *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*. Infact, the word *Rāmāyaṇa* was *Vālmīki's* creation and had a distinct background behind it – both secular and spiritual. That is why *Gosvāmī Tulasī Dāsa* mentions the word *Rāmāyaṇa* (*yad rāmāyaṇe nigaditam*) to mean *Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa*. If we say *Rāmāyaṇa*, we mean *Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇa* unless it is qualified otherwise like *Adhyātma*, *Ananda*, *Adbhuta* etc.

Though *Kamban* draws inspiration for his epic-composition from *Vālmīki*, the pioneer and originator of this great tradition, he transcreated the epic in Tamil with a

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 native touch keeping in view the cultural background of the theme, the popular taste of the people in Tamilnadu — both learned and illiterate — and earlier references found in the Pre-*Kamban* and even in the Pre-*Tiruvalluvar* period of Tamil literature. Thus *Kamban's Rāmāvatāram* (or *Irāmāvatāram*) is not merely an exposition of the *avatāra* (incarnation) of *Rāma*, but, incidentally, it happens to be a poetic incarnation of the cultural and metaphysical thought behind it. If *Vālmīki* had rendered Vedic Vision into poetic expression, *Kamban* transformed transcendental genius into a popular piece of literary narrative — easily accessible even to the common man in his own idiom.

It will help us appreciate *Kamban's* emergence as an originator of the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in the South if we quickly go through some interesting references to various episodes in *Rāmāyaṇa* during pre-*Kamban* period :

Rāma silences the noise of birds sitting on a tree under which he is engaged in a serious conversation with his friend *Sugrīva*. This is found in *Akamanūru*. Another work, *Purānanūr*, describes in a humorous language how the monkeys of *Kiṣkindhā* tried to wear the garments dropped down by *Sītā* during her abduction by *Rāvaṇa*. In *Paripatal*, *Indra* leaves the hermitage of *Gautam* after achieving his desired union with *Ahalyā* in the disguise of a cat. The marriage ritual observed in the South where the bride is required to step on a grinding-stone figures in *Śilappatikāram*. This is a symbolic relic of *Ahalyā's* episode. The famous episode of a small squirrel trying to help in the huge construction of the *Setu* is found in

another work. The famous *Alaṅkāra* and *Alaṅkāra* has number of references to the story of *Rāma*. *Periyālvār* refers to *Hanumān*'s role as an effective messenger who carries the thoughts of *Rāma* in *Kiṣkindhā* to *Sītā* in *Laṅkā*.

Besides these references found in the ancient Tamil literature, *Kamban* was thoroughly conversant with the vast literature available in Sanskrit, Prakrit and *Apabhraṃśa* on the theme. He was a shrewd and sensitive observer of nature — the rivers, the mountains and the greenery around. That is why he starts his epic with a picturesque description of the river *Sarayū*. He named his daughter after the river *Kāverī*. Like *Vālmiki*, who draws his inspiration for writing his epic from the river *Tamasā*, *Kamban*, too, was fond of the pleasant flow of water in the rivers. He was fond of the soil, too, and those who cultivate it. He sincerely felt that one who can cultivate the land fruitfully can cultivate the world and also the world of words usefully and meaningfully. In this respect, we find him close to the great Telugu poet, *Potana*.

More than anything else, *Kamban* was a man of the masses. He picked up his thoughts, words and vibrations from his people and the time in which he lived with them. There were three poets in Tamil language who were honoured with the title *kavi cakravarī* (emperor of poesy). The other two were poet-laureates exchanging their words for earthly possessions and passing position. But *Kamban* cared little for these temporal comforts and devoted his entire life for glorifying the Lord and purifying the world — the world full of people and their pleasures and pains.

No doubt he enjoyed the patronage of *Coḷā* kings and *Cerā* rulers. He was with the *Kākaṭīyas* in Warangal, too, for some time. But he discarded the royal patronage the moment he found it self-defacing. He lived with the people and wrote for the people. He was therefore a *kavi cakravarī* in the real sense of the term because it is only a universal thinker with universal vision who can command respect among the common people as a king of poets and not a poet of kings.

This is evidenced in the preamble to *Kambarāmāyaṇam* where the poet does not make any mention of a royal patron, but glorifies the intrinsic nobility and genuine generosity of his patron – friend *Caḍaiyan* who brought him up as a family member in times of distress and destitution. In token of his appreciation of the help he received from *Caḍaiyan*, *Kamban* wrote a book *Erelubāḍu* (In praise of the plough) and this was his maiden work dedicated to his friend. Incidentally *Sītā*, the main character in *Rāmāyaṇa*, is also an offspring of the Mother Earth, sprung from the touch of a plough (*Lāngatāduṭṭhiṭā*).

The structural basis of *Kamba-Rāmāyaṇam* is similar to that of *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa*; but *Kamban* concludes his work with the coronation ceremony of *Rāma* after he wins over *Rāvaṇa* and wins back his noble wife, *Sītā*. The story that follows, which is popularly termed *Uttara Kāṇḍa*, is an appendix to the main story covering six *Kāṇḍas* – from *Bāla Kāṇḍa* to *Yuddha Kāṇḍa*. *Kamban* covers these six *Kāṇḍas* in 118 *patalams* containing 10368 stanzas in all, each stanza consisting of 4 lines. In volume, this

approximates to the text of *Vālmīki* spread over 24,000 ślokaś – each śloka consisting of 2 lines. *Kamban* had great respect for *Vālmīki*, to whom he pays a glowing tribute by describing him as *Vāgmī*, an expert in the art of speech. He also refers to him as *Nal-Vālmīki the (Vālmīki the good)*. The word ‘good’ summarizes not only the poetic excellence of *Vālmīki*, but also the purport of the great epic *Rāmāyaṇa*. The main thrust of *Rāmāyaṇa* is the promotion of good, as distinguished from *Mahābhārata*, which emphasizes the ultimate victory of righteousness. It is also a striking coincidence that both *Vālmīki* and *Kamban* start their epic compositions with the description of a river with its water flowing like the crystal-clear conscience of a good person. It was *Tamasā* which inspired *Vālmīki* and *Kamban* finds a similar inspiration in the waters of the river *Sarayū*.

The preamble which *Kamban* presents before the actual story begins is very brief but beautifully designed. He starts with *Nadipatala* where he describes the river *Sarayū* in 20 stanzas, then proceeds to *Deśa-patala* consisting of 61 stanzas where the royal domain of *Kośāla* is picturesquely described. Thereafter, he describes *Ayodhyā* in the third *patala* (chapter) in 75 stanzas. The final one in the preamble is the *Śāsan-patala* (12 stanzas) where a popular government headed by a peace-loving king, *Daśaratha*, devoted to the service of the people, finds a glorious expression. These four *patals* or phases form the four pillars for the poetic edifice the poet built taking the raw material from the traditional story of *Rāmāyaṇa* as narrated by *Vālmīki*.

We do not know when *Vālmīki* was born, but we celebrate *Vālmīki Jayantī* on the full-moon day in the month of *Āśvina*. Similarly, *Kamban* is remembered on *Phālguna-Hasta* every year when thousands of people pay homage to this great poet, an emperor of poesy—*kavi cakravarī* — to commemorate the first public recital (*araṅgetram*) of *Kambarāmāyaṇam* by *Kamban* himself. it is said that the venue chosen for this first public recital was *Śrīraṅgam* temple and the year was 885 AD. according to some and 1185 AD. according to others. It seems that *Kamban* composed a paean in praise of *Śatakopa Azhwār* (*Nammāzhwār*) on the spot and recited it before the formal recitation of *Rāmāyaṇa* started. This poem is popularly known as *Śatakopa-antādi*. This shows *Kamban's* faith in Vaishnavism which is evident in the treatment *Rāmāyaṇa* received in this hands.

Śaraṇāgati is one of the major characteristics of *viśiṣṭa advaita* philosophy which the *Azhwārs* preached and practised. *Kamban* introduces this concept of *Śaraṇāgati* — taking refuge at the feet of the Lord with total dedication and unqualified sense of surrender — while describing the episode of *Vibhīṣaṇa* approaching *Rāma* for shelter. While *Kamban* closely follows *Vālmīki* in this context, he springs a surprise on the traditional readers of *Rāmāyaṇa* by incorporating the episode of *Prahlāda* and *Hiraṇya Kaśipu*. This is a major deviation from *Vālmīki*.

Among the minor deviations, *Kamban* traces the origin of *Rāma* to the *Cola* dynasty. According to historians, this is supported by an inscription found in Cape

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Comorin. Incidentally, one can find an element of patriotism in this assertion. A more interesting deviation from *Vālmīki* is the description of the premarital love of *Rāma* and *Sītā*. This is in accordance with the Tamil tradition of *Kaṭavu* and *Karbu*. *Tulasī* also incorporates this episode in his *Rāma carita Mānasa*, but in a slightly different way. According to *Kamban*, *Sītā* happens to see *Rāma* when the latter takes a round in the city on the eve of his participation in the *svayamvaram*. Here again, *Kamban* follows another Tamil tradition of *vīthi-vihāra* (city sight-seeing). This description elaborately covers an independent chapter known as *Uḷaviār-pāṭalam*.

On hearing the pleasant news that King *Janaka* has decided to give *Jānakī* to *Rāma* who has won her hand by handling the bow and arrow of Lord *Śiva* in a marvellous manner, King *Daśaratha* makes a pleasant trip to *Mithilā* with all royal entourage, pomp and paraphernalia. This description is wonderful in *Kamban*.

Kamban handles the event of *Rāma*'s exile to the forests at the mysterious instance of *Kaikeyī* in a characteristic way. He hints at a divine will behind the whole conspiracy and does not blame *Kaikeyī* who had always a soft corner for *Rāma* – dearer to her than *Bharata* himself. *Rāma*, too, accepts the sudden change in the course of events as divine dynamism (which *Vālmīki* often refers to as *Yadrccchā*). Kavi *Samrāṭa Viśvanātha Satyanārāyaṇa* of the twentieth century takes this hint perhaps from *Kamban* and depicts the mysterious twin characters of *Kaikeyī* and *Rāma* who understood each other in terms of

a divine mission. This vision is unique in *Kaṭi Cakravarṭi Kamban* and *Kaṭi Samrāṭa Viśvanātha*. The greatness of the two characters was that they visualised this mission and acted with astonishing firmness to translate it into action. *Kamban* depicts *Mantharā* as an incarnation of *Māyā*, the effective force behind *Viṣṇu*, the Lord of the Universe.

Kamban's Śūrpaṇakhā is also a new creation. She was graceful, beautiful, reasonable, innocent and convincing though aggressive towards the end in her approach to *Rāma*. *Kamban* describes her charming personality in enchanting lines:

pañjiyolir viñjukulir pallavamaiuṅgā
śeñjeviya kañjanimir śiradiyatāgi
añjolila mañjayena vannamena minnum
vañjiyena nañjamena vañjamagaḷ vaṇḍāl

These lines need no translation nor can they be rendered into any other language without sacrificing the basic requirement of being both fair and faithful. *Rāma*, too, had this dilemma in rejecting her outright and so he had to ask his brother *Lakṣmaṇa* to cut her nose lest she should injure theirs. *Kamban's* handling of this situation is superb.

Another innovation that we find in *Kamban* is in the manner in which *Rāvaṇa* lifts *Sītā* from her cottage. He lifts her along with the entire cottage because he was afraid of touching her by hand. It may have been that he was pure at heart though weak in character.

The consideration *Kamban* shows for *Jatāyu* rouses pathos in the hearts of readers. The scene of *Rāma*

performing the funeral rites for *Jaṭāyu* which he could not do for his own father shows his magnanimity which the sacrificial bird richly deserved. The whole scene reverberates with *karuṇa* (pathos) and its efficacy.

Kamban's Hanumān, like a wise statesman, unites *Rāma* and *Sugrīva* in a diplomatic way. His movements, words and humility ornamented by his dedication to service, commitment to the commands of his master and his instinctive and inexplicable devotion to *Sītā* and *Rāma* are ably portrayed by *Kamban*.

Tārā's intervention to convince the angry *Lakṣmaṇa* about the sincerity of *Sugrīva* is also well brought out by *Kamban*. When *Lakṣmaṇa* looks at *Tārā* in the form of a pious and peace-looking widow, he tries to imagine his mother in a similar form and speaks to her in a soft tone. *Vālmiki* depicted *Tārā* in a different way.

Kamban pours out similes after similes to express the ecstatic joy which *Sītā* experienced on receiving her husbands's ring through *Hanumān*. *Kamban* follows *Vālmiki* very closely in *Sundara Kāṇḍa* so that the basic beauty of the whole setting is maintained and magnified without any breach of propriety.

In the battle-field also, *Kamban's* characters excel not only in valour but also in culture. Even *Rāvaṇa* and *Kumbhakarna* were not exceptions. The dialogue between *Kumbhakarna* and *Vibhīṣaṇa* – both brothers with different philosophies of life – is worth noticing for any politician of the present and future centuries. *Rāvaṇa's* appreciation of the magnificent personality of *Rāma*, visualising in him

the qualities of Śiva, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Aṭṭiya or to be more precise, a combination of all these cosmic forces makes us feel that poor Rāvaṇa was pure at heart though driven by fate to a devilish ditch. This reminds us of Vālmīki whose Rāvaṇa also reacts in a rational way on seeing Rāma in the battle-field. He sees Nārāyaṇa in him whose infinite grace and grandeur cannot be assessed otherwise. Tulasī also found in Rāma a person who can make the creator, the preserver and the destroyer dance to his tune (*Vidhi, Hari, Śambhu Nacāvanahāre*). Rāma, too, appreciates the grandeur of Rāvaṇa despite his evil motive.

Thus all characters of *Kamban* – good or bad – have a dignified personality of their own. They speak to us prompted by the poet who created them. That is why *Kamban* is rightly remembered as the Emperor of poets and poesy.

Kamban's successor *Oṭṭakkuṭṭar* (12 cent.) composed the *Uttara Kāṇḍam* in 30 *paṭalams* and 1532 verses and added it to *Kamban's* work in order to make it complete. This poet was also *Kavi cakravarī*.

It is not that *Kamban's* genius and tradition got digested with him and in him. It has been preserved by the later poets like *Aruṇācala* (18 cent.) the author of *Rāmāyaṇa Kīrtanai*, *Rāmaliṅga Svāmī* (19 cent), *Koṭṭayūr Subrahmanya Iyer* who composed *Rāmāyaṇa-Vemba* in about 10,000 verses. Scholars like *Naṭeś*, *Śāstrī C.R. Śrīnivāsa Iyeṅgar* and *Tātācāriyar* tried to educate the Tamil mind and heart with discourses and dissertations on *Vālmīki* and *Kamban*. *Tulasī's Rāma Carita Mānasa* also influenced Tamil culture and philosophy of life.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in Kannada is also as old as it is in Tamil. The contribution of *Jaina* scholars and poets to this tradition is noteworthy. It was Vimala Suri who started this tradition in the third century with his time-honoured composition *Pauma-Cariya* in Prakrit. Later *Guṇabhadra-cārya* (898 AD) promoted this trend in his 'Pauranic' works. *Padmapurāṇa* (678 AD) in Sanskrit by *Ravi Ṣeṇa*, *Triṣaṣṭi Śālākā Puruṣa Carita* (12 cent) by *Hema Candra* and *Rāma Carita* (1596) in Sanskrit prose by *Devagaṇe* are some of the monumental works belonging to *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in the South – particularly in Karnataka promoted by Kannada poets. But these are mostly in Sanskrit and Prakrit.

Jaina tradition in Kannada compositions relating to the story of *Rāma* started with *Rāma Candra Carita Purāṇa* (popularly known as *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa*) by *Nāgacandra* (1150 AD). Some of the other works carried forward this tradition in Kannada are *Rāmāyaṇa* of *Kumudendu Kavi* (1275), *Rāmakathāvatāra* of *Deva Candra* (1794), *Jina Rāmāyaṇa* of *Candra Sāgara Varṇī* (1810) and *Rāma Vijaya Kāvya* of *Devappa Kavi*.

The first available *Rāmāyaṇa* in Kannada which covers the story of *Rāma* in complete form though diversified in details is *Rāmacandra Carita Purāṇa* (1150 AD) by the *Jaina* poet *Nāgacandra*. The author follows *Padmapurāṇa* of *Ravi Ṣeṇa*. Popularly known as *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa*, this corresponds to *Kamba Rāmāyaṇa* in Tamil. The date of composition is also more or less the same though Tamil scholars consider *Kamban* to be earlier than

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Pampa. There is a reference to a still earlier work in Kannada entitled *Bhuvanaika Rāmābhyaṇa* (951 AD) by the poet *Ponna*. But this is not available now.

The main features of *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* are : *Lakṣmaṇa* plays a more prominent role than his elder brother *Rāma*. He kills *Rāvaṇa* and brings victory to *Rāma*. He kills the son of *Śūrpaṇakhā*, thus unknowingly rousing anger in the mind of *Śūrpaṇakhā*. There is no mention of any Vedic ritual nor does *Viśvāmitra* figure anywhere. There is no *Paraśurāma*, no *Mantharā*. *Bharata* feels jealous of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa*. No bridge was built by *Rāma* or the monkeys to cross the sea. It was managed by yogic powers. *Hanumān* is depicted as the son-in-law of *Rāvaṇa*'s sister. Disgusted with *Rāvaṇa*'s cruel deeds, he joins *Rāma*'s side, just like *Vibhīṣaṇa* but much earlier. He burns *Laṅkā* with his yogic powers. *Sītā* does not stay in *Vālmīki*'s hermitage when she was abandoned by *Rāma*. Instead she takes to Jainism and becomes an ascetic. As far as the poetic value is concerned, *Pampa Rāmāyaṇa* is fine piece of literary expression couched in a sweet and melodious language – a pleasant blend of prose and poetry.

The Vedic tradition starts, however, with *Torāvai Rāmāyaṇa* of the sixteenth century supposed to have been written by a poet called *Narahari* also known as *Kumāra Vālmīki*. *Torāvai* is a place in Bijapur district in Karnataka. The poet *Narahari*, the author of this *Rāmāyaṇa*, was a worshipper of Lord *Narasimha*, the presiding deity of this place, and hence the name *Torāvai Rāmāyaṇa*. The poet drew inspiration basically from *Vālmīki* and also from

Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa in Saṅskṛit and composed the work in about 5000 stanzas. *Kumāra Vālmīki* was primarily a devotee of Lord *Narasimha* and *Rāma* and this devotion made him a poet. Like *Tulasī*, *Narahari* too glorifies the Lord, his name, his actions and words with devotional ecstasy. He does not waste words in the mere narration of the story, rather uses the story for the glorification of his Lord. More than half the composition is devoted to *Yuddha Kāṇḍa*. His *Rāvaṇa* too was a great devotee. Before he proceeds to the battle-field, he releases the prisoners and distributes food and wealth to the poor. He advises his wife *Mandodarī* to take to *Vibhīṣaṇa* in the event of his death. *Rāvaṇa* repents in the end but does not surrender to *Rāma*. He was a tragic hero.

Rāma of *Narahari* was fully aware of the fact that his exile to the forest would be in the larger interests of humanity – purging the terror-stricken society of the evil forces.

Kaikeyī deliberately did this to glorify *Rāma*. This is however not a new innovation we find in *Narahari*. This was there in *Kamban* and is there in even the present day *Rāmāyaṇas*.

Following the tradition set by *Narahari*, we find many other works in Kannada like *Rāmābhyaṇa Kathā Kusuma Mañjarī* (1750 AD) of *Timmāmātya*, *Śrīrāmapaṭṭābhiseka* (19 cent) of *Maddana* who wrote *Adbhuta Rāmāyaṇa* and *Rāmāśvamedha* too and *Hanumad Rāmāyaṇa* (1750 AD) of *Subrahmaṇya Kavi*. There are number of works in Kannada covering the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* in parts like *Sītā Kalyāṇa*

of *Gerashappa Shastri* (1830), *Iravataśara* of Aliya Liṅgarāja (1823-74) and *Śatakanṭha Rāmāyaṇa* of Śrīnivāsa Rāya etc. *Rāmakathā Kalpa Vr̥kṣa* by the Mysore Mahārāja Kṛṣṇa Rāya needs special mention.

Among the modern works based on *Rāmāyaṇa*, the most outstanding one is *Rāmāyaṇa Darśanam* of the well-known Kannada poet Dr. K.V. Putṭappa. It was for this work that he received the *Jñānpīṭh* Award, the most prestigious literary award in the country, for the year 1967. *Kuvempu*, as the poet is popularly known in the modern world of letters, is a literary colossus whom no single law of poetics can totally interpret. His is not an individual voice, but the voice of the Spirit of the Age and of the Nation. He visualised the epic dimensions of the great personality that *Rāma* manifested in his words, thoughts and actions and presented that *Darśana* in his monumental work *Rāmāyaṇa Darśanam*. Composed in *Mahāchandas* metre, this epic covers a wide canvas of 50 cantos divided into four parts – *Ayodhyā Samputa*, *Kiṣkindhā Samputa*, *Lankā Samputa* and *Śrī Samputa*. In his own words, the poet has not just narrated the story in these lines, but tried to assimilate and disseminate the philosophy behind it bringing out the eternal truths underlined in the temporal events. The poet's vision, in its multi-dimensional projection, has invested the epic characters with a new significance – both individual and symbolic. The seer-poet is seen in his sagacious work as a visionary who combines the archaic, the modern, the mechanical, the metaphysical and the super-man yet to emerge. His emphasis was on man-making and he wanted the human beings to rise above

the scientific and technological advancement and evolve a secular philosophy that *Rāmāyaṇa* reveals if properly viewed. This epic, though based on *Vālmīki*, has grown fuller in dimensions not comprehended before.

The Telugu language also has the privilege to contribute a *Rāmāyaṇa* that attracted the eyes of *Vāgdevī*. *Rāmāyaṇa Kalpa Vr̥kṣam* of Kavi Samrāṭa Viśvanātha Satyanārāyaṇa (1895-1976) was chosen for the *Jñānpūh* Award for the year 1970, just three years after *Putṭappa* received this honour for his *Rāmāyaṇa Darśanam*. These two events amply demonstrate the persistent public appreciation for the story of *Rāmāyaṇa* in the world of letters – both ancient and modern. *Rāmāyaṇa Kalpa Vr̥kṣam* of Viśvanātha, published in 1963 in six volumes, has a background of about seven centuries from *Raṅganātha* to Viśvanātha. *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*, believed to have been composed in the 13th Cent., is the first complete and comprehensive poetic composition in Telugu depicting the story of *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇa* was also composed almost at the same time in the same century jointly by four poets who formed a team for this production under the guidance of master-mind *Bhāskara*. Besides *Bhāskara*, there was his son *Mallikārjuna Bhaṭṭa*, his student *Kumāra Rudra Deva* and his friend *Ayyalārya*. Though the two works – *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam* and *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇam* – came to light almost simultancously, *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam* had the special advantage of royal patronage which must have given it a good start and made it more popular. Also, the language used in the former is simple and closer to spoken idiom

as compared to the classical diction used by the *Bhāskara* group.

It cannot be said that the Telugu language had no *Rāmāyaṇa* before these two works were out. Infact *Tikkana*, one of the three eminent poets who transcreated *Mahābhārata* in Telugu, wrote *Nirvacanottara Rāmāyaṇam*; a purely poetic composition based on the story of *Rāma* after his victorious return to *Ayodhyā*. This was also written in the 13 Cent. when the other two *Rāmāyaṇas* discussed above were in circulation. But *Tikkana*'s work does not cover the entire story. *Tikkana*'s grandfather, known by the name *Bhāskara*, is said to have composed a full-fledged *Rāmāyaṇa* (12 cent). But unfortunately, this is not available now. So the first available comprehensive poetic composition on *Rāmāyaṇa* theme in Telugu is the *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*.

Gona Buddha Redḍi (1240-95), the son of King *Viṭṭhala*, wrote this in six *Kāṇḍas* (parts) of 17290 *dvipadas* (a native metre consisting of two lines, very popular with *Vīraśaiva* poets). The name *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam* indicates the author's desire to associate his father's name with the work which he wrote at his instance. *Viṭṭhala* and *Raṅga* are synonymous and the word *Raṅganātha* may also refer to the Lord of the Universe whose story *Rāmāyaṇa* is. *Buddha Rāju Redḍi* basically followed *Vālmiki* but the deviations he made from the original illustrate his study of other *Rāmāyaṇas* in Sanskrit like *Ānanda Rāmāyaṇa*. He did not write *Uttara Kāṇḍa* but his sons did it for him thus giving the work a complete shape.

The major deviations from *Vālmiki* found in this work are the introduction of two characters – *Rāvaṇa*'s mother *Kaikaśī* and *Indrajit*'s wife *Sulocanā*. The poet depicts *Kaikaśī* as an ideal mother with a heart full of affection and sympathy for her perverted son. She tries to convince him that he should retrace his steps to avoid global disaster. But the adamant son submits to his mother that it is too late to revise his stand and his self-respect stands in the way of surrendering to *Rāma*, with his ten heads bowed at the feet of an ordinary man. This scene is very touching and gives a cordial touch to the family-life of *Rāvaṇa*.

Sulocanā, the devoted wife of *Indrajit*, proceeds to the battle-field immediately after hearing of her husband's collapse. She appeals to *Rāma* for granting her the dead body. *Rāma* tests her chastity by asking her to speak to her lifeless husband and she does it. *Rāma* admires her and grants her the body of her husband in which she merges – physically, mentally and spiritually.

There is a change in *Mantharā*'s attitude to the proposed coronation of *Rāma*. It was not jealousy but revenge that prompted *Mantharā* to stall the installation of *Rāma* on the throne as she was lamed by *Rāma* when he was a child. While playing with a stick, he hurled it on the old woman and it hit her hard and that hardness became the origin of the entire story.

Śūrpanakhā also approaches *Rāma* with an attempt to take revenge against *Lakṣmaṇa* who killed her son *Jambukāśura* engrossed in deep penance beside a tree. It was just a fate-driven incident. *Lakṣmaṇa* sees a suspended

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sword near the tree where *Jambūka* was doing penance. Just to test the power of that sword, he cut the tree which in turn cut *Jambūka*'s head. This drove *Śurpaṅkhā* to *Rāma*'s hermitage where the mere sight of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* transforms her revengeful mood to a passionate desire for the two princes.

Ahalyā of *Raṅganātha* turns into a stone, unlike in *Vālmīki*, at the curse of *Gautama*. *Indra* enters the hermitage in the guise of a cock and wakes up *Gautama* at midnight and makes him proceed to the river for the morning bath.

The first meeting of *Hanumān* and *Rāma* at the outskirts of *Kiṣkindhā* is portrayed in a unique way. *Hanumān* offers a mango as a greeting gift to the prince of *Ayodhyā* in whom *Hanumān* visualises a man with a mission. Similarly *Rāma* admires *Hanumān*'s way of introducing himself and his master. He also finds a golden chain decorating his neck. This is the garland of letters which *Rāma* alone can visualise.

The story of a squirrel trying to help in the construction of *Setu* across the sea by adding a few grains of sand to the stones is found in *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*, too. *Rāma* pats the squirrel on the back and the finger-prints of *Rāma* are eternally imprinted on all squirrels till now. There is a proverb in Telugu referring to this devotion of squirrel (*uḍuṭā bhakti*).

Kālanemi causing hurdles for *Hanumān* who was on his way to *Sanjīvanī* mountain to secure the life-giving drug for *Lakṣmaṇa*, is also a minor deviation from *Vālmīki*, but

found in some other *Rāmāyaṇas* in Sanskrit and modern Indian languages including *Rāma Carita Mānasa*.

Rāma's installing of *Śiva-liṅga* on the sea-shore after the battle is won is also a special feature of *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*. This is found in *Mānasa* too, but the timing is different. *Tulasī* makes *Rāma* perform this before the battle starts while *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam* places this as a concluding festive occasion to celebrate the victory of *Rāma* which means the victory of truth and righteousness. Another difference is that *Tulasī*'s *Rāma* performs this alone while *Sūtā* joins *Rāma* in the Telugu version. In either case this incident has a cultural significance of bridging the gulf between the north and the south, the Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

It is also significant that both *Rāma Carita Mānasa* and *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam* emphasise the point that the great personality *Rāma* was a synthesis of *Śiva* and *Keśava* – the cosmic forces of preservation and dissolution. *Sūtā* stands for the cosmic energy while *Rāma* stands and tries for its conservation and coordination.

Next to *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*, *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇam* is the most popular one. Most of the innovations we find in this work are there in *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam*, too. The background behind *Mantharā*'s vengeance, the killing of *Śūrpaṇakhā*'s son and the episode of *Kālanemi* are common to both. The special features of *Bhāskara Rāmāyaṇam* are *Tārā*'s curse on *Rāma* after *Vālī*'s death, the reservoir of *neelavar* at the navel of *Rāvaṇa*, *Bharata* not participating in the divine feast hosted by

Bharadvāja, *Vibhīṣaṇa* receiving the blessings of his mother *Kaikaśī* before his defection of *Rāma*'s side and *Rāvaṇa*'s passage to *Pātāla* (the lower world) to reinforce himself besides a few observations and reflections of major characters here and there. For instance, when *Rāma* offers *Laṅkā* to *Vibhīṣaṇa* in the event of his victory, he is questioned as to what he would do if *Rāvaṇa* himself comes to seek shelter under him. *Rāma* readily replies that he will grant *Ayodhyā* to *Rāvaṇa* by taking the consent of *Bharata*. This shows the magnanimity of *Rāma*. *Tārā*'s curse on *Rāma* that he would be deprived of *Sītā*'s company even after the battle is won degrades the character of *Tārā* who maintains a high profile in *Kamban* and *Vālmiki*.

Molla Rāmāyaṇam of 14 cent. by a poetess called *Molla* is a short, sweet and soft moving composition which touches the tender hearts of men and women because of its captivating simplicity and delightful dynamism. The whole work is complete in 631 verses interspersed by lucid prose passages. Each and every word spreads a fresh fragrance like a Jasmine flower.

There is no *Mantharā* here. *Kaikeyī* demands her right to the royal throne on her own. *Molla* does not mention the name of *Ahalyā* while she describes the entire episode with special emphasis on her redemption at the mere touch of *Rāma*'s feet. *Indra* and *Gautama* do not figure at all. In spite of her love for brevity, *Molla* takes special care to describe the spectacular leap that *Hanumān* takes over the sea, his encounter with *Kālanemi*, his meeting *Bharata* on

his return flight and his dialogue with *Sītā* in *Aśoka Vāṭikā*. Indeed *Molla* finds herself in her element while depicting *Hanumān*. There is a fine blend of poetic expression, devotional ecstasy and human touch in her fascinating flow of words. The scene of *Guha* washing the feet of *Rāma* lest his feet should transform his boat also into a beautiful lady is an unforgettable piece of literary genius that *Molla* created in her 'Brief-case *Rāmāyaṇa*', if we may say so.

Rāmābhyudayam (1540AD) of *Ayyalarāju Rāmabhadra Kavi* is also a popular *Rāmāyaṇa* in Telugu, but the emphasis is more on poetic excellence than on human values or divinity in man. Among other *Rāmāyaṇas* of repute in the medieval age, mention should be made of *Raghunātha Rāmāyaṇa* (1600-73), *Accha Telugu Rāmāyaṇa* by *Kūcimañci Timmana* (1690-1757) and *Uttara Rāmāyaṇam* of *Kaṅkanti Pāpa Rāju* (1575-1630).

Accha Telugu Rāmāyaṇam of *Timmakavi* has a special place and significance not only in Telugu *Rāmāyaṇas* but also in Telugu literature. Telugu is a language which normally sounds Sanskritised due to the high percentage of Sanskrit words used in it. Just to have a change and to see how pure Telugu free from Sanskrit vocabulary tastes, poets like *Timmakavi* experimented on writing in pure Telugu. As the Telugu readers are normally used to reading and even speaking Sanskritised Telugu, the pure Telugu becomes difficult for them to understand. But *Timmakavi* made his *Rāmāyaṇa* both pure and palatable and even delightful. The composition, covering about 1400 verses reads like drops of honey. This is divided into six *Kāṇḍas*

like any other *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Yuddhā Kāṇḍa*, the last one, covering more than half the volume. There are some minor deviations from *Vālmiki* like *Jaṭāyu* appearing for the first time only after the abduction of *Sītā* and *Hanumān* encountering *Laṅkīnī* after the whole city is burnt.

Drawing inspiration from *Bhavabhūti* and *Tikkana* who had dealt with the theme of *Uttara Kāṇḍa* of *Rāmāyaṇa* in Sanskrit and Telugu respectively, *Kaṅkanti Pāparāju* attempted the same theme from his own angle in his work *Uttara Rāmāyaṇamu*. He also acknowledges his indebtedness to *Puṣpagiri Timmana*, the author of *Samīra Kumāra Vijayam*. The poet covers the story in 3000 verses divided into 8 chapters. This is a very popular work in Telugu and the poems are used in plays and other cultural performances.

Among the *Rāmāyaṇas* produced in the present century, *Rāmāyaṇa Kalpavṛkṣam* of *Viśvanātha Satyanārāyaṇa* commands highest regard and respect. It took 30 years for him to complete this magnum opus which brought him the *Jñānāpūṭh* Award in 1970. He followed *Vālmiki* both in structure and sequence though there are some minor deviations. His *Kaikeyī* is more mysterious than mischievous. She organises the banishment of *Rāma* with a purpose and with the consent of *Rāma* himself. This is found in several other *Rāmāyaṇas* also; but *Viśvanātha* handles it in a very tactful way. *Rāma* meets *Ahalyā* for the second time on his way back to *Ayodhyā* to take her blessings after marriage. The marriage of *Sītā* and *Rāma* is very brief in *Vālmiki* while *Viśvanātha* describes it with all

vividly making it a typical Telugu marriage. The story of *Sundara Kāṇḍa* gets a philosophical colour in the hands of *Viśvanātha*. He divides this *Kāṇḍa* into 5 *Kāṇḍas* – *Pūrva Rātra* (fore-night), *Parā Rātra* (afternight), *Uṣā* (dawn), *Divā* (day) and *Sandhyā* (twilight). The events that take place in a period of 24 hours are described with a metaphysical background highly suggestive and thought-provoking. We find a similar analysis of other *Kāṇḍas* too, which merit special study and proper appreciation. *Rāma* makes a short halt at the hermitage of *Atri* and *Anasūyā* on his way back to *Ayodhyā* where *Sītā* receives two banana fruits from *Anasūyā* as a blessing. *Sītā* promptly hands them over to *Rāma*. Such incidents, too, have much to say for those who have an inner eye, ear and heart. *Viśvanātha* had indeed planted a *Kalpavṛkṣa* in the field of modern Indian literature – rich with fresh and fragrant imagery, colourful characterisation and fruition of an ideology that has abiding value for this troubled age.

Some of the other *Rāmāyaṇas* of this century are *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Rāmāyaṇam* of *Śrīpāda Kṛṣṇa Mūrty Śāstrī* (1866-1960), *Janapriya Rāmāyaṇam* of *Puttaparti Nārāyaṇa-caryulu* and *Rāmakathā Rasa Vāhinī* of *Śrī Satya Sāi Bābā* of *Praśanti Nilayam*. *Bābā's Rāmāyaṇam* is *Bābā-Vākyam* for his devotees and *Veda-Vākyam* for the students of *Rāmāyaṇa*. This was published in 1985 in 2 volumes covering 600 pages. The narration is so lively that the readers feel that *Bābā* is speaking to them. The stories narrated by *Viśvāmītra* have assumed new dimensions in *Bābā's* melodious tone and sonorous voice.

Telugu language has a fertile ground for the growth of *Rāmāyaṇa* literature. Almost all prominent poets have attempted the theme and most of them were successful. There are more than 300 *Rāmāyaṇas* worth their name and fame in Telugu. The folk literature is saturated with stories, ballads and songs on *Rāma*. There are some folk songs like *Urmitā Devī Nidrā* (the deep slumber of *Urmitā*) which can be compared with classics in Telugu and other Modern Indian Languages.

Tyāgarāja's songs present a galaxy of highlights in *Rāmāyaṇa*. Apart from his outstanding contribution to Karnatak music, *Tyāgarāja's* insight into the intricacies of *Vālmiki's* vision is superb. His song *Śrī Rāma Jaya Rāma Śringāra Rāma* not merely narrates the entire story of *Bāla Kāṇḍa* in a well-set sequence but also brings out the broad vision with which *Vālmiki* had discovered *Rāma* for the benefit and betterment of mankind. His description of the joy that overflowed from the heart of sage *Viśvāmitra* on seeing *Rāma* bending the bows of *Śiva* as a matter of course needs careful study and critical appreciation to understand how deep the saint has dived into the heart of *Vālmiki* and his *Rāma*. In short, *Tyāgabrahma* created another *Rāma* for himself with the blessings of *Vālmiki*. His *Rāma* speaks to him face to face. Attempts have been made to weave out a connected story of *Rāmāyaṇa* with the proper assemblage of the saint's periodical songs.

The *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in Malayalam starts with *Rāmacaritam* by a poet, *Śrīrāman* by name, who lived in the 13th Cent. This composition is technically called *Pāṭṭu*

as per the norms laid down by *Līlātilakam*. It is divided into 164 parts containing 1814 stanzas; each stanza starting from the last word of the previous one. Incidentally, this happens to be a pioneer work in Malayalam poetry. The major portion of the work is devoted to the story pertaining to *Yuddha Kāṇḍa* though other parts of the story leading to the battle are also covered here and there. This is a trend-setter for the future *Rāma-Kāvya*s in Malayalam. The author seems to have been greatly influenced by *Kamban* not only in depicting *Rāma* as an incarnation of *Viṣṇu* but also in adapting Tamil metres and Tamil vocabulary for a poetic composition in Malayalam. In this respect, it influenced the later poets.

Rāmakathā Pāṭṭu of *Ayyappilli Āsān* is another major step in this direction. The author described by P.K. *Nārāyaṇa Pillai* as 'Homer of Malayalam' is believed to have composed this work approx. in 1400 AD. It is a lyrical composition consisting of 3163 songs. The work presents a pleasant blend of poetry, music and dance mainly intended for stage performance. The poet excels in his presentation of dialogues.

Kaṇṇassa Rāmāyaṇam by *Rāma Paṇikker* (15 cent) serves as a link between *Rāmacaritam* of *Śrīrāman* and *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* of *Ezhuttachan*. The author establishes a school of poets known as *Niranam* school. In line with *Vālmīki*, the poet *Paṇikker* depicts *Rāma* not as an incarnation of *Viṣṇu* but as an ideal man perfect in action and practical in outlook towards life. The influence of *Advaita* philosophy is amply evidenced in the work

which is lyrical in style and structure. *Bhakti* or devotion based on *Advaita* is the key note of the work covering about 3000 *pāttus* or songs.

Rāmāyaṇa Campu by *Pūnam Nambūdri* (15 cent) is another landmark in the *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition in Malayalam. In this work, *Pūnam* introduces the typical Malayalam style popularly known as *Maṇipravālam* allowing a fine blend of native and Sanskrit vocabulary. The author was a pioneer in this field. Even *Campu* style was a new experiment. The poet narrates the story in five *Kāṇḍas* starting from the birth of *Rāvaṇa* to the final end. *Campu Rāmāyaṇa* by the patron poet *Bhoja* must have influenced *Pūnam*.

The most popular *Rāmāyaṇa* in Malayalam viewed from all angles – language, diction, devotion, human values, cultural integrity and human dignity – is *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* of *Tunchat Ezhuttachan* (16 cent). The poet and his devotional poetry have a lasting impact on Kerala culture, particularly in the field of devotion. He enjoys the same respect, regard and repute in Kerala as *Tulasī* in the north. It is a coincidence that both *Tulasī* and *Ezhuttachan* derived inspiration from the Sanskrit work by the same name. It was just a matter of chance that *Ezhuttaccan* was commissioned to transliterate the Sanskrit text of *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* from Telugu script to Malayalam characters. In the process, the transcriber took fancy and derived immense pleasure in translating the work into Malayalam and the result was his magnum opus which has sustained a spontaneous appreciation for the last four centuries.

For *Tulasī*, *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇam* in Sanskrit provided the major source of inspiration while for *Ezhuttachan* it was the main and perhaps the sole reservoir of poetry, philosophy, devotion and culture. Even in translation, he set standards which can be adopted even today. His work is a free rendering of the Sanskrit text which reads like original composition. He makes the parrot narrate the story and hence the qualifying phrase *Nillipāṭu* suffixed to his work. He combines devotion with knowledge through integrity in thought, word and deed. This makes his exposition not merely expressive but also impressive to the ear, heart and soul. He rises to poetic and devotional heights while singing the glory of his Lord and takes his readers also with him to the realms unrevealed to the mundane world. Thus *Ezhuttachan*'s *Rāmāyaṇa* has literally spread the inner soul of the immortal story of *Rāma*. Born in low caste, the poet elevated the lower strata of society to the respectable position of pious devotees of *Rāma* – a position which has no parallel in the world of possessions and professions. The description of *Sītā*'s *Svayamvara* is fantastic. His dialogues are lively. His *Rāmāyaṇa* is read with reverence by most of the devoted Hindus in Kerala as a religious daily ritual. The language used by the author is so simple and so close to a pan-Indian parlance that it can be understood and appreciated by any Indian, whatever be his mother-tongue. This reverberating quality is present in *Rāma Carita Mānasa* also, such works transcend the limitations of language. They have a language of their own – a language intelligible to the heart because it comes from the heart.

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Among other *Rāmāyaṇas* in Malayalam, mention should be made of the *Rāmanāṭṭam* by *Koṭṭarakkara Tampūran* (1653-94). This is meant mainly for stage-presentation in *Kathakali* style. The author, the founder of this style, used this form to promote a better and quicker appreciation of the story of *Rāma* and the philosophy behind it. *Bhāṣa Vālmīki Rāmāyaṇam* (popularly known as *Kerala Vermā Rāmāyaṇam*) is another landmark in *Rāmāyaṇa* literature in Malayalam. This was a 17th Cent. production presenting a fair and faithful rendering of *Vālmīki* for the benefit of the common readers not conversant with Sanskrit. The language is simple and the translation is superb. The author has tried to highlight the inner meaning of the story besides providing a pleasant translation.

Vallattol, the father figure of Malayalam literature, also rendered *Vālmīki* into simple, chaste and captivating Malayalam language. Kerala Verma's *Pātāla Rāmāyaṇam* describes the abduction of *Rāma* and *Lakṣmaṇa* to *Pātāla* (the lower world) by *Rāvaṇa* during the battle and *Hanumān* saving the two princes from the disaster.

The 20th Cent. produced an original work based on an important episode in *Rāmāyaṇa* in the form of a thought-provoking poem entitled *Cintā Viṣṭayāye Sūta* (*Sūta* engrossed in introspection) by the reputed modern poet *Kumāran Āsān*. Prior to this monumental work, *Āsān* wrote *Bālārāmāyaṇam* for children in 1916. Three years later he took up this work which compels even the realised souls dedicated to *Rāma* to have a re-look at the fate of *Sūta*

who was mercilessly abandoned by the great man not merely of his age but of the ages. Though aggrieved and depressed, *Sītā* does not throw the entire blame on *Rāma*, but tries to understand his split-personality as a man and as a king. This gives us and the modern age a deep insight into human psychology with a philosophical outlook towards life. It presents a rare synthesis of the individual and the universal and *Āsān* could not have made a better choice to present such a vision before the modern man who believes more in machine than in mission.

Thus the thousand years of literary exercise in the four south Indian languages have contributed substantially to the promotion of *Rāmāyaṇa* tradition thereby enriching the cultural heritage of this great nation.

Tamil found in *Kamban*, a trend-setter who gave new dimensions to the good old story, Kannada tried to identify the basic unity underlined in the perplexing diversity in the various traditions of *Rāmāyaṇa* – *Jain*, *Buddha*, *Vedic* and *secular*. Telugu poets demonstrated their unqualified devotion to *Rāma* and his eternal message through an enormous literature covering more than 300 popular works on *Rāmāyaṇa* – a figure which no other regional language could probably quote. Apart from the number, the quality we find in the classical composition from *Raṅganātha Rāmāyaṇam* to *Viśvanātha Rāmāyaṇam* is a matter of pride for the whole nation and the world of letters in general. Lastly, Malayalam added music and dance to the age-old tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* and popularised its presentation among the learned and the illiterate. Even the dance form

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kathakālī has contributed to the popularisation of *Rāmākathā* which is the only *kathā* (story) that can find a solution to the troubles and turmoils of this *kālī*. Summing up, we can say these four languages have respectively and respectfully offered *Nīti* (formulation), *Neti* (exploration), *prīti* (extolation) and *Gīti* (glorification) to the time-honoured tradition of *Rāmāyaṇa* which by nature, knows no time, space and species. It is for all time to come, for all nations in the world for all people on this planet.

THAILAND, THE LAND OF RĀMA

A casual visitor to Thailand cannot resist appreciating the natural beauty in and around Bangkok, the present capital of Thailand. At a little distance from Bangkok lies *Ayuthayā*, the former capital of the country. As one walks through the roads and takes in the breathtaking landscape which lies between *Ayuthayā* and Bangkok, one gets the natural feeling that this land, once upon a time, must have been inhabited by a highly majestic personality – as pure as water and as pious as the breeze that flows along. This is testified by the historical ruins – the memories of a bygone regal era – that one finds near *Ayuthayā*.

If there is a *Rāmarājya* in the world today, it exists only in Thailand. The present dynasty of kings rightly chose to prefix their names with the epithet *Rāma*. One feels elevated to know that Thailand's first king – *Rāma*, the first, was not only a successful warrior in the battle-field but was also the author of the most significant work in Thai language *The Rāmkiān* or the *Thāi Rāmāyaṇa*. All his successors have adopted the name of *Rāma* as a glorifying attribute to their royal name. There is that rare combination of royal dignity and devotional ecstasy even among the rulers of this land. All this leads one to believe that Thailand – more than any other place and more than anything else – is basically the land of *Rāma* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. The spirit of *Rāma* breathes freely here – it has glorified its past and it pervades its present.

There is yet another combination — a synthesis of Hinduism and Buddhism in every part of the country. This is seen at its best in the temple of the Emerald Buddha. The paintings on the walls speak volumes about the royal family's devotion to *Rāma* and *Buddha* alike. Their equal devotion to *Rāma* and *Buddha* is an evidence of their affinity more towards a unifying spirituality rather than an introvert and isolating religion. It was my great fortune to see the temple on a day when the royal family was also visiting the temple to offer their annual prayer. It was an auspicious day, the 6th April, which is called *Cakrī* day. The name *Cakrī* used in the sense of *Cakravarī* has a double significance. The word *Cakrī* means *Viṣṇu* and *Cakravarī* means king. This shows how the royal family identifies itself with the universal presence of divinity both within and without.

I have not come across any auspicious name in the Thai language which is not prefixed by the sacred syllable *Śrī*. An Indian may occasionally refer to *Rāma* as a mere *Rāma* but a Thai invariably says *Śrī Rāma*. Even the place *Ayuthayā* is called *Śrī Ayuthayā*. This reminds us of *Vālmīki*'s description of the city *Ayodhayā* as *Śrīmaṭī* (*Śrīmaṭī Trīṇi Vistīrṇā*).

Thailand is not only a land of *Rāma* but also a land of rice. It provides adequate foodgrains not only for the natives but also exports rice to other countries. A land with plenty of rice as its main produce is referred to in Sanskrit language as *Bahuvrīhi*. Incidentally, this is a technical term in Sanskrit grammar and denotes a class of compound

words. Thailand can serve as an example for this compound. Infact India can also be called *Bahuvrīhi* as rice happens to be the main agricultural produce here as in the case of Thailand.

India and Thailand have a lot in common – culturally and spiritually. Even the names of festivals are very close to the Indian culture. April 13/14 is a significant point of time in the annual cycle when Sun enters into the first point of Aries (*Meṣa*). This is called *Meṣāyana* in Thai language. Similarly every month is called an *ayana* – *Meṣāyana* and *Vṛṣabhāyana* etc. In India we have only two *Ayanas* – *Uttarāyana* and *Dakṣiṇāyana* while in Thailand every month is an *Ayana* making a total of 12 in a year. This is perhaps the reason why *Rāmāyana* which is also a king of *Ayana* is so dear to the people of this land. It is therefore *Rāmāyana*, the immortal work of the sage *Vālmiki* which serves as a cultural link between India and Thailand.

A close and careful study of *Rāmkiān* or the *Thāi Rāmāyana* not only convinces an Indian that Thai is not much different from India both culturally and spiritually but it also gives even the most enlightened scholars of India an ever new perspective pertaining to this celebrated work *Rāmāyana*. *Rāmkiān* written by King *Rāma*, the first of Siam dynasty is not merely confined to the discerning readers of the educated elite. It is carried right to the heart of the common man by depicting it on the walls of the temple of the 'Emerald Buddha' in the main palace of Bangkok. Some of the twisted forms of the proper names in *Rāmāyana* are very interesting and at the same time

appealing. For instance, *Sugrīva* is called *Sukrīp*, *Vālī* is called *Pālī*, *Rāvaṇa* is called *Totsakand* meaning thereby *Daśaskandha*, *Śūrpaṇakhā* is *Sammanakhā*, *Aṅgada* is called *Oṅkat* and *Kaikeyī* becomes *Kaikakesī*. The fight between *Vālī* and *Sugrīva* is described as the fight between lightning and thunder. *Hanumān*, the off-spring of the wind is depicted as a commandant endowed with supernatural powers having mastery over military science.

Finally, the Thai script, if carefully analysed, combines in itself the characteristics of almost all Indian scripts. For a person acquainted with Indian scripts, it does not take more than a day to master the Thai script. Though the two appear to be far away from one another from a physical or a geographical point of view, the language, the literature, the culture and the philosophy of Thailand are very close to those of India. The Governments and the peoples of India and Thailand should take note of this unique affinity and utilise it for the cultural, emotional and spiritual integration of the two noble countries in particular and the entire humanity in general.

